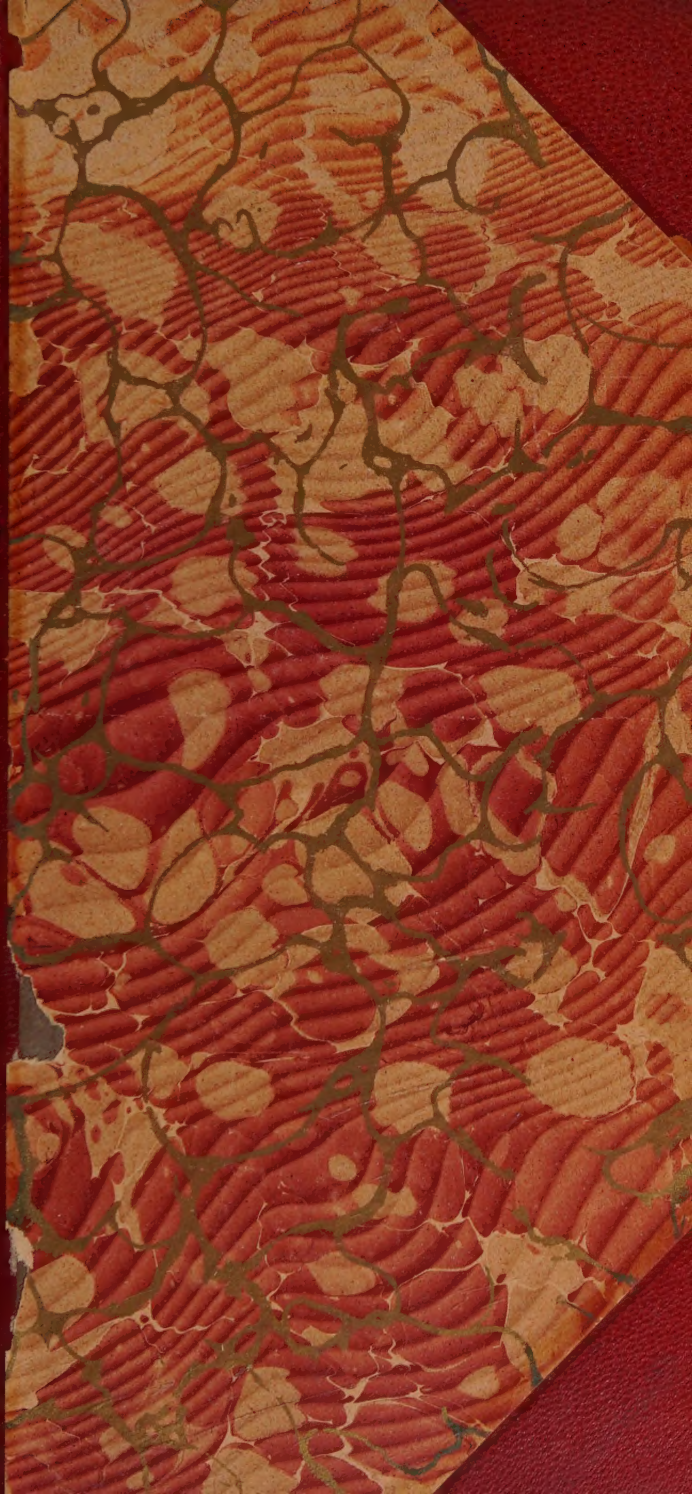




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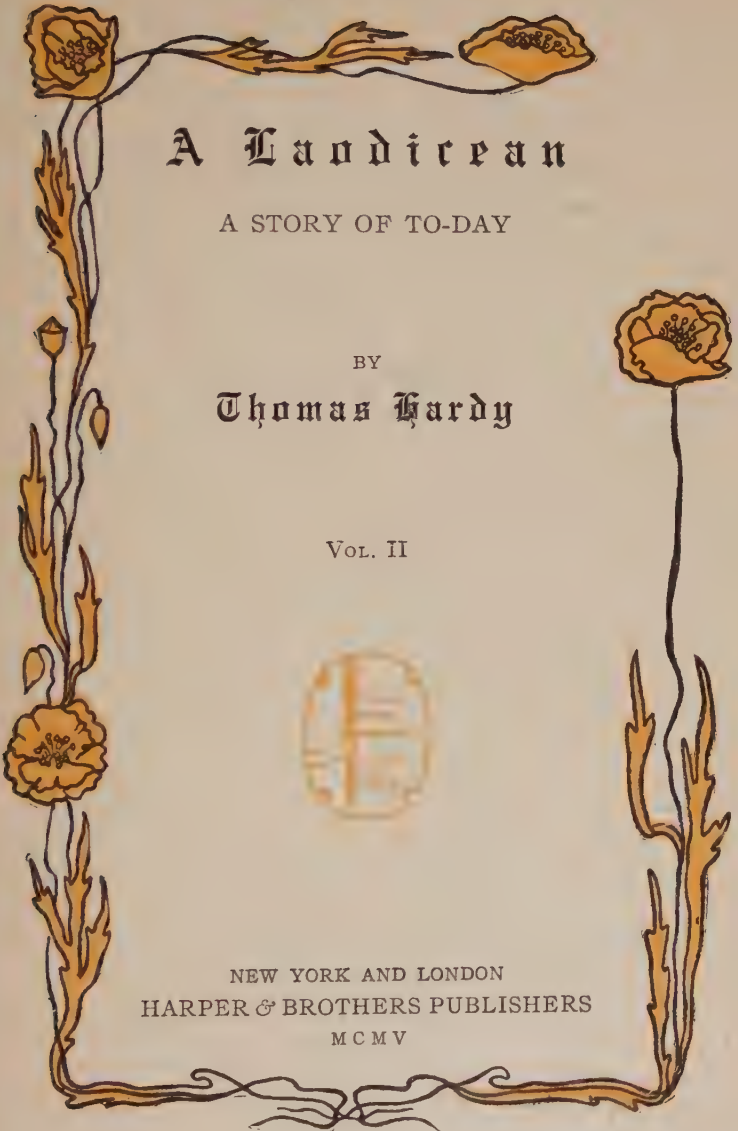
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A LAODICEAN

A decorative border in a light orange or yellow color frames the text. It features stylized flowers and leafy branches. At the top, two flowers are connected by a branch. On the left, a branch with several leaves and a flower runs vertically. On the right, a single flower is at the top, with a long stem and leafy branches extending downwards. At the bottom, a horizontal branch with leaves connects the left and right sides.

A Luddiean

A STORY OF TO-DAY

BY

Thomas Hardy

VOL. II



NEW YORK AND LONDON
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BOOK THE THIRD

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VII

WHEN he awoke the next morning at the Lord-Quantock-Arms Hotel Somerset felt quite morbid on recalling the intelligence he had received from Mrs. Camperton. But as the day for serious practical consultation about the castle works, to which Paula had playfully alluded, was now close at hand, he determined to banish sentimental reflections on the frailties that were besieging her nature, by active preparation for his professional undertaking. To be her high-priest in art, to elaborate a structure whose cunning workmanship would be meeting her eye every day till the end of her natural life, and saying to her, 'He invented it,' with all the eloquence of an inanimate thing long regarded—this was no mean satisfaction, come what else would.

He returned to town the next day to set matters there in such trim that no inconvenience should result from his prolonged absence at the castle; for having no other commission he determined (with an eye rather to heart-interests than to increasing his professional practice) to make, as before, the castle itself his office, studio, and chief abiding-place till the works were fairly in progress.

On the tenth he reappeared at Markton. Passing through the town, on the road to Stancy Castle, his eyes were again arrested by the notice-board which

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had conveyed such startling information to him on the night of the ball. The small bills now appeared thereon; but when he anxiously looked them over to learn how the parts were to be allotted, he found that intelligence still withheld. Yet they told enough; the list of lady-players was given, and Miss Power's name was one.

That a young lady who, six months ago, would scarcely join for conscientious reasons in a simple dance on her own lawn, should now be willing to exhibit herself on a public stage, simulating love-passages with a stranger, argued a rate of development which under any circumstances would have surprised him, but which, with the particular addition, as leading colleague, of Captain De Stancy, inflamed him almost to anger. What clandestine arrangements had been going on in his absence to produce such a full-blown intention it were futile to guess. Paula's course was a race rather than a march, and each successive heat was startling in its eclipse of that which went before.

Somerset was, however, introspective enough to know that his morals would have taken no such virtuous alarm had he been the chief male player instead of Captain De Stancy.

He passed under the castle-arch and entered. There seemed a little turn in the tide of affairs when it was announced to him that Miss Power expected him, and was alone.

The well-known ante-chambers through which he walked, filled with twilight, draughts, and thin echoes that seemed to reverberate from two hundred years ago, did not delay his eye as they had done when he had been ignorant that his destiny lay beyond; and he followed on through all this ancientness to where the modern Paula sat to receive him.

He forgot everything in the pleasure of being alone in a room with her. She met his eye with that in her

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own which cheered him. It was a light expressing that something was understood between them. She said quietly in two or three words that she had expected him in the forenoon.

Somerset explained that he had come only that morning from London.

After a little more talk, in which she said that her aunt would join them in a few minutes, and that Miss De Stancy was still indisposed at her father's house, she rang for tea and sat down beside a little table. 'Shall we proceed to business at once?' she asked him.

'I suppose so.'

'First then, when will the working drawings be ready, which I think you said must be made out before the work could begin?'

While Somerset informed her on this and other matters, Mrs. Goodman entered and joined in the discussion, after which they found it would be necessary to adjourn to the room where the plans were hanging. On their walk thither Paula asked if he stayed late at the ball.

'I left soon after you.'

'That was very early, seeing how late you arrived.'

'Yes. . . . I did not dance.'

'What did you do then?'

'I moped, and walked to the door; and saw an announcement.'

'I know—the play that is to be performed.'

'In which you are to be the Princess.'

'That's not settled,—I have not agreed yet. I shall not play the Princess of France unless Mr. Mild plays the King of Navarre.'

This sounded rather well. The Princess was the lady beloved by the King; and Mr. Mild, the young lieutenant of artillery, was a diffident, inexperienced, rather plain-looking fellow, whose sole interest in theatricals lay in the consideration of his costume and

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the sound of his own voice in the ears of the audience. With such an unobjectionable person to enact the part of lover, the prominent character of leading young lady or heroine, which Paula was to personate, was really the most satisfactory in the whole list for her. For although she was to be wooed hard, there was just as much love-making among the remaining personages; while, as Somerset had understood the play, there could occur no flingings of her person upon her lover's neck, or agonized downfalls upon the stage, in her whole performance, as there were in the parts chosen by Mrs. Camperton, the major's wife, and some of the other ladies.

‘Why do you play at all!’ he murmured.

‘What a question! How could I refuse for such an excellent purpose? They say that my taking a part will be worth a hundred pounds to the charity. My father always supported the hospital, which is quite undominational; and he said I was to do the same.’

‘Do you think the peculiar means you have adopted for supporting it entered into his view?’ inquired Somerset, regarding her with critical dryness. ‘For my part I don’t.’

‘It is an interesting way,’ she returned persuasively, though apparently in a state of mental equipoise on the point raised by his question. ‘And I shall not play the Princess, as I said, to any other than that quiet young man. Now I assure you of this, so don’t be angry and absurd! Besides, the King doesn’t marry me at the end of the play, as in Shakespeare’s other comedies. And if Miss De Stancy continues seriously unwell I shall not play at all.’

The young man pressed her hand, but she gently slipped it away.

‘Are we not engaged, Paula!’ he asked. She evasively shook her head.

‘Come—yes we are! Shall we tell your aunt?’ he

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continued. Unluckily at that moment Mrs. Goodman, who had followed them to the studio at a slower pace, appeared round the doorway.

‘No,—to the last,’ replied Paula hastily. Then her aunt entered, and the conversation was no longer personal.

Somerset took his departure in a serener mood, though not completely assured.

VIII

HIS serenity continued during two or three following days, when, continuing at the castle, he got pleasant glimpses of Paula now and then. Her strong desire that his love for her should be kept secret, perplexed him ; but his affection was generous, and he acquiesced in that desire.

Meanwhile news of the forthcoming dramatic performance radiated in every direction. And in the next number of the county paper it was announced, to Somerset's comparative satisfaction, that the cast was definitely settled, Mr. Mild having agreed to be the King and Miss Power the French Princess. Captain De Stancy, with becoming modesty for one who was the leading spirit, figured quite low down, in the secondary character of Sir Nathaniel.

Somerset remembered that, by a happy chance, the costume he had designed for Sir Nathaniel was not at all picturesque ; moreover Sir Nathaniel scarcely came near the Princess through the whole play.

Every day after this there was coming and going to and from the castle of railway vans laden with canvas columns, pasteboard trees, limp house-fronts, woollen lawns, and lath balustrades. There were also frequent arrivals of young ladies from neighbouring country houses, and warriors from the X and Y

batteries of artillery, distinguishable by their regulation shaving.

But it was upon Captain De Stancy and Mrs. Camperton that the weight of preparation fell. Somerset, through being much occupied in the drawing-office, was seldom present during the consultations and rehearsals : until one day, tea being served in the drawing-room at the usual hour, he dropped in with the rest to receive a cup from Paula's table. The chatter was tremendous, and Somerset was at once consulted about some necessary carpentry which was to be specially made at Markton. After that he was looked on as one of the band, which resulted in a large addition to the number of his acquaintance in this part of England.

But his own feeling was that of being an outsider still. This vagary had been originated, the play chosen, the parts allotted, all in his absence, and calling him in at the last moment might, if flirtation were possible in Paula, be but a sop to pacify him. What would he have given to impersonate her lover in the piece ! But neither Paula nor any one else had asked him.

The eventful evening came. Somerset had been engaged during the day with the different people by whom the works were to be carried out ; and in the evening went to his rooms at the Lord-Quantock-Arms, Markton, where he dined. He did not return to the castle till the hour fixed for the performance, and having been received by Mrs. Goodman, entered the large apartment, now transfigured into a theatre, like any other spectator.

Rumours of the projected representation had spread far and wide. Six times the number of tickets issued might have been readily sold. Friends and acquaintances of the actors came from curiosity to see how they would acquit themselves ; while other classes of people came because they were eager to see well-known notabilities in unwonted situations. When ladies, hitherto

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only beheld in frigid, impenetrable positions behind their coachmen in Markton High Street, were about to reveal their hidden traits, home attitudes, intimate smiles, nods, and perhaps kisses, to the public eye, it was a throwing open of fascinating social secrets not to be missed for money.

The performance opened with no further delay than was occasioned by the customary refusal of the curtain at these times to rise more than two feet six inches; but this hitch was remedied, and the play began. It was with no enviable emotion that Somerset, who was watching intently, saw, not Mr. Mild, but Captain De Stancy, enter as the King of Navarre.

Somerset as a friend of the family had had a seat reserved for him next to that of Mrs. Goodman, and turning to her he said with some excitement, 'I understood that Mr. Mild had agreed to take that part?'

'Yes,' she said in a whisper, 'so he had; but he broke down. Luckily Captain De Stancy was familiar with the part, through having coached the others so persistently, and he undertook it off-hand. Being about the same figure as Lieutenant Mild the same dress fits him, with a little alteration by the tailor.'

It did fit him indeed; and of the male costumes it was that on which Somerset had bestowed most pains when designing them. It shrewdly burst upon his mind that there might have been collusion between Mild and De Stancy, the former agreeing to take the captain's place and act as blind till the last moment. A greater question was, could Paula have been aware of this, and would she perform as the Princess of France now De Stancy was to be her lover?

'Does Miss Power know of this change?' he inquired.

'She did not till quite a short time ago.'

He controlled his impatience till the beginning of the second act. The Princess entered; it was Paula.

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But whether the slight embarrassment with which she pronounced her opening words,

‘ Good Lord Boyet, my beauty, though but mean,
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise,’

was due to the newness of her situation, or to her knowledge that De Stancy had usurped Mild’s part of her lover, he could not guess. De Stancy appeared, and Somerset felt grim as he listened to the gallant captain’s salutation of the Princess, and her response.

De S. Fair Princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.

Paula. Fair, I give you back again : and welcome, I have not yet.

Somerset listened to this and to all that which followed of the same sort, with the reflection that, after all, the Princess never throughout the piece compromised her dignity by showing her love for the King ; and that the latter never addressed her in words in which passion got the better of courtesy. Moreover, as Paula had herself observed, they did not marry at the end of the piece, as in Shakespeare’s other comedies. Somewhat calm in this assurance, he waited on while the other couples respectively indulged in their love-making and banter, including Mrs. Camperton as the sprightly Rosaline. But he was doomed to be surprised out of his humour when the end of the act came on. In abridging the play for the convenience of representation, the favours or gifts from the gentlemen to the ladies were personally presented : and now Somerset saw De Stancy advance with the necklace fetched by Paula from London, and clasp it on her neck.

This seemed to throw a less pleasant light on her hasty journey. To fetch a valuable ornament to lend it to a poorer friend was estimable ; but to fetch it that the friend’s brother should have something magnificent

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to use as a lover's offering to herself in public, that wore a different complexion. And if the article were recognized by the spectators as the same that Charlotte had worn at the ball, the presentation by De Stancy of what must seem to be an heirloom of his house would be read as symbolizing a union of the families.

De Stancy's mode of presenting the necklace, though unauthorized by Shakespeare, had the full approval of the company, and set them in good humour to receive Major Camperton as Armado the braggart. Nothing calculated to stimulate jealousy occurred again till the fifth act ; and then there arose full cause for it.

The scene was the outside of the Princess's pavilion. De Stancy, as the King of Navarre, stood with his group of attendants awaiting the Princess, who presently entered from her door. The two began to converse as the play appointed, De Stancy turning to her with this reply—

Rebuke me not for that which you provoke ;
The virtue of your eye must break my oath.'

So far all was well ; and Paula opened her lips for the set rejoinder. But before she had spoken De Stancy continued—

' If I profane with my unworthy hand
 (Taking her hand)
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this—
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Somerset stared. Surely in this comedy the King never addressed the Princess in such warm words ; and yet they were Shakespeare's, for they were quite familiar to him. A dim suspicion crossed his mind. Mrs. Goodman had brought a copy of Shakespeare with her, which she kept in her lap and never looked at : borrowing

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it, Somerset turned to 'Romeo and Juliet,' and there he saw the words which De Stancy had introduced as gag, to intensify the mild love-making of the other play. Meanwhile De Stancy continued—

'O then, dear Saint, let lips do what hands do ;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.
Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purg'd !'

Could it be that De Stancy was going to do what came next in the stage direction—kiss her? Before there was time for conjecture on that point the sound of a very sweet and long-drawn osculation spread through the room, followed by loud applause from the people in the cheap seats. De Stancy withdrew from bending over Paula, and she was very red in the face. Nothing seemed clearer than that he had actually done the deed. The applause continuing, Somerset turned his head. Five hundred faces had regarded the act, without a consciousness that it was an interpolation; and four hundred and fifty mouths in those faces were smiling. About one half of them were tender smiles; these came from the women. The other half were at best humorous, and mainly satirical; these came from the men. It was a profanation without parallel, and his face blazed like a coal.

The play was now nearly at an end, and Somerset sat on, feeling what he could not express. More than ever was he assured that there had been collusion between the two artillery officers to bring about this end. That he should have been the unhappy man to design those picturesque dresses in which his rival so audaciously played the lover to his, Somerset's, mistress, was an added point to the satire. He could hardly go so far as to assume that Paula was a consenting party to this startling interlude; but her otherwise unaccount-

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able wish that his own love should be clandestinely shown lent immense force to a doubt of her sincerity. The ghastly thought that she had merely been keeping him on, like a pet spaniel, to amuse her leisure moments till she should have found appropriate opportunity for an open engagement with some one else, trusting to his sense of chivalry to keep secret their little episode, filled him with a grim heat.

IX

AT the back of the room the applause had been loud at the moment of the kiss, real or counterfeit. The cause was partly owing to an exceptional circumstance which had occurred in that quarter early in the play.

The people had all seated themselves, and the first act had begun, when the tapestry that screened the door was lifted gently and a figure appeared in the opening. The general attention was at this moment absorbed by the newly disclosed stage, and scarcely a soul noticed the stranger. Had any one of the audience turned his head, there would have been sufficient in the countenance to detain his gaze, notwithstanding the counter-attraction forward.

He was obviously a man who had come from afar. There was not a square inch about him that had anything to do with modern English life. His visage, which was of the colour of light porphyry, had little of its original surface left; it was a face which had been the plaything of strange fires or pestilences, that had moulded to whatever shape they chose his originally supple skin, and left it pitted, puckered, and seamed like a dried water-course. But though dire catastrophes or the treacherous airs of remote climates had done their worst upon his exterior, they seemed to have affected him but little within, to judge from a cer-

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tain robustness which showed itself in his manner of standing.

The face-marks had a meaning, for any one who could read them, beyond the mere suggestion of their origin: they signified that this man had either been the victim of some terrible necessity as regarded the occupation to which he had devoted himself, or that he was a man of dogged obstinacy, from sheer *sang froid* holding his ground amid malign forces when others would have fled affrighted away.

As nobody noticed him, he dropped the door hangings after a while, walked silently along the matted alley, and sat down in one of the back chairs. His manner of entry was enough to show that the strength of character which he seemed to possess had phlegm for its base and not ardour. One might have said that perhaps the shocks he had passed through had taken all his original warmth out of him. His beaver hat, which he had retained on his head till this moment, he now placed under the seat, where he sat absolutely motionless till the end of the first act, as if he were indulging in a monologue which did not quite reach his lips.

When Paula entered at the beginning of the second act he showed as much excitement as was expressed by a slight movement of the eyes. When she spoke he turned to his next neighbour, and asked him in cold level words which had once been English, but which seemed to have lost the accent of nationality: 'Is that the young woman who is the possessor of this castle—Power by name?'

His neighbour happened to be the landlord at Sleeping-Green, and he informed the stranger that she was what he supposed.

'And who is that gentleman whose line of business seems to be to make love to Power?'

'He's Captain De Stancy, Sir William De Stancy's son, who used to own this property.'

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‘Baronet or knight?’

‘Baronet—a very old-established family about here.’

The stranger nodded, and the play went on, no further word being spoken till the fourth act was reached, when the stranger again said, without taking his narrow black eyes from the stage: ‘There’s something in that love-making between Stancy and Power that’s not all sham!’

‘Well,’ said the landlord, ‘I have heard different stories about that, and wouldn’t be the man to say what I couldn’t swear to. The story is that Captain De Stancy, who is as poor as a gallicrow, is in full cry a’ter her, and that his on’y chance lies in his being heir to a title and the wold name. But she has not shown a genuine hanker for anybody yet.’

‘If she finds the money, and this Stancy finds the name and blood, ’twould be a very neat match between ’em,—hey?’

‘That’s the argument.’

Nothing more was said again for a long time, but the stranger’s eyes showed more interest in the passes between Paula and De Stancy than they had shown before. At length the crisis came, as described in the last chapter, De Stancy saluting her with that semblance of a kiss which gave such umbrage to Somerset. The stranger’s thin lips lengthened a couple of inches with satisfaction; he put his hand into his pocket, drew out two half-crowns which he handed to the landlord, saying, ‘Just applaud that, will you, and get your comrades to do the same.’

The landlord, though a little surprised, took the money, and began to clap his hands as desired. The example was contagious, and spread all over the room; for the audience, gentle and simple, though they might not have followed the blank verse in all its bearings, could at least appreciate a kiss. It was the unusual acclamation raised by this means which had led Somerset to turn his head.

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When the play had ended the stranger was the first to rise, and going downstairs at the head of the crowd he passed out of doors, and was lost to view. Some questions were asked by the landlord as to the stranger's individuality; but few had seen him; fewer had noticed him, singular as he was; and none knew his name.

While these things had been going on in the quarter allotted to the commonalty, Somerset in front had waited the fall of the curtain with those sick and sorry feelings which should be combated by the aid of philosophy and a good conscience, but which really are only subdued by time and the abrading rush of affairs. He was, however, stoical enough, when it was all over, to accept Mrs. Goodman's invitation to accompany her to the drawing-room, fully expecting to find there a large company, including Captain De Stancy.

But none of the acting ladies and gentlemen had emerged from their dressing-rooms as yet. Feeling that he did not care to meet any of them that night, he bade farewell to Mrs. Goodman after a few minutes of conversation, and left her. While he was passing along the corridor, at the side of the gallery which had been used as the theatre, Paula crossed it from the latter apartment towards an opposite door. She was still in the dress of the Princess, and the diamond and pearl necklace still hung over her bosom as placed there by Captain De Stancy.

Her eye caught Somerset's, and she stopped. Probably there was something in his face which told his mind, for she invited him by a smile into the room she was entering.

'I congratulate you on your performance,' he said mechanically, when she pushed to the door.

'Do you really think it was well done?' She drew near him with a sociable air.

'It was startlingly done—the part from "Romeo and Juliet" pre-eminently so.'

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‘Do you think I knew he was going to introduce it, or do you think I didn’t know?’ she said, with that gentle sauciness which shows itself in the loved one’s manner when she has had a triumphant evening without the lover’s assistance.

‘I think you may have known.’

‘No,’ she averred, decisively shaking her head. ‘It took me as much by surprise as it probably did you. But why should I have told!’

Without answering that question Somerset went on. ‘Then what he did at the end of his gag was of course a surprise also.’

‘He didn’t really do what he seemed to do,’ she serenely answered.

‘Well, I have no right to make observations—your actions are not subject to my surveillance; you float above my plane,’ said the young man with some bitterness. ‘But to speak plainly, surely he—kissed you?’

‘No,’ she said. ‘He only kissed the air in front of me—ever so far off.’

‘Was it six inches off?’

‘No, not six inches.’

‘Nor three.’

‘It was quite one,’ she said with an ingenuous air.

‘I don’t call that very far.’

‘A miss is as good as a mile, says the time-honoured proverb; and it is not for us modern mortals to question its truth.’

‘How can you be so off-hand!’ broke out Somerset. ‘I love you wildly and desperately, Paula, and you know it well!’

‘I have never denied knowing it,’ she said softly.

‘Then why do you, with such knowledge, adopt an air of levity at such a moment as this! You keep me at arm’s-length, and won’t say whether you care for me one bit, or no. I have owned all to you; yet never once have you owned anything to me!’

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‘I have owned much. And you do me wrong if you consider that I show levity. But even if I had not owned everything, and you all, it is not altogether such a grievous thing.’

‘You mean to say that it is not grievous, even if a man does love a woman, and suffers all the pain of feeling he loves in vain? Well, I say it is quite the reverse, and I have grounds for knowing.’

‘Now, don’t fume so, George Somerset, but hear me. My not owning all may not have the dreadful meaning you think, and therefore it may not be really such a grievous thing. There are genuine reasons for women’s conduct in these matters as well as for men’s, though it is sometimes supposed to be regulated entirely by caprice. And if I do not give way to every feeling—I mean demonstration—it is because I don’t want to. There now, you know what that implies; and be content.’

‘Very well,’ said Somerset, with repressed sadness, ‘I will not expect you to say more. But you do like me a little, Paula?’

‘Now!’ she said, shaking her head with symptoms of tenderness and looking into his eyes. ‘What have you just promised? Perhaps I like you a little more than a little, which is much too much! Yes,—Shakespeare says so, and he is always right. Do you still doubt me? Ah, I see you do!’

‘Because somebody has stood nearer to you to-night than I.’

‘A foggy like him!—half as old again as either of us! How can you mind him? What shall I do to show you that I do not for a moment let him come between me and you?’

‘It is not for me to suggest what you should do. Though what you should permit *me* to do is obvious enough.’

She dropped her voice: ‘You mean, permit you to

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do really and in earnest what he only seemed to do in the play.'

Somerset signified by a look that such had been his thought.

Paula was silent. 'No,' she murmured at last. 'That cannot be. He did not, nor must you.'

It was said none the less decidedly for being spoken low.

'You quite resent such a suggestion: you have a right to. I beg your pardon, not for speaking of it, but for thinking it.'

'I don't resent it at all, and I am not offended one bit. But I am not the less of opinion that it is possible to be premature in some things; and to do this just now would be premature. I know what you would say—that you would not have asked it, but for that unfortunate improvisation of it in the play. But that I was not responsible for, and therefore owe no reparation to you now. . . . Listen!'

'Paula—Paula! Where in the world are you?' was heard resounding along the corridor in the voice of her aunt. 'Our friends are all ready to leave, and you will surely bid them good-night!'

'I must be gone—I won't ring for you to be shown out—come this way.'

'But how will you get on in repeating the play to-morrow evening if that interpolation is against your wish?' he asked, looking her hard in the face.

'I'll think it over during the night. Come to-morrow morning to help me settle. But,' she added, with coy yet genial independence, 'listen to me. Not a word more about a—what you asked for, mind! I don't want to go so far, and I will not—not just yet anyhow—I mean perhaps never. You must promise that, or I cannot see you again alone.'

'It shall be as you request.'

'Very well. And not a word of this to a soul. My

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aunt suspects: but she is a good aunt and will say nothing. Now that is clearly understood, I should be glad to consult with you to-morrow early. I will come to you in the studio or Pleasance as soon as I am disengaged.'

She took him to a little chamfered doorway in the corner, which opened into a descending turret; and Somerset went down. When he had unfastened the door at the bottom, and stepped into the lower corridor, she asked, 'Are you down?' And on receiving an affirmative reply she closed the top door.

X

SOMERSET was in the studio the next morning about ten o'clock superintending the labours of Knowles, Bowles, and Cockton, whom he had again engaged to assist him with the drawings on his appointment to carry out the works. When he had set them going he ascended the staircase of the great tower for some purpose that bore upon the forthcoming repairs of this part. Passing the door of the telegraph-room he heard little sounds from the instrument, which somebody was working. Only two people in the castle, to the best of his knowledge, knew the trick of this ; Miss Power, and a page in her service called John. Miss De Stancy could also despatch messages, but she was at Myrtle Villa.

The door was closed, and much as he would have liked to enter, the possibility that Paula was not the performer led him to withhold his steps. He went on to where the uppermost masonry had resisted the mighty hostility of the elements for five hundred years without receiving worse dilapidation than half-a-century produces upon the face of man. But he still wondered who was telegraphing, and whether the message bore on house-keeping, architecture, theatricals, or love.

Could Somerset have seen through the panels of the door in passing, he would have beheld the room occupied by Paula alone.

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It was she who sat at the instrument, and the message she was despatching ran as under :—

‘Can you send down a competent actress, who will undertake the part of Princess of France in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” this evening in a temporary theatre here? Dresses already provided suitable to a lady about the middle height. State price.’

The telegram was addressed to a well-known theatrical agent in London.

Off went the message, and Paula retired into the next room, leaving the door open between that and the one she had just quitted. Here she busied herself with writing some letters, till in less than an hour the telegraph instrument showed signs of life, and she hastened back to its side. The reply received from the agent was as follows :—

‘Miss Barbara Bell of the Regent’s Theatre could come. Quite competent. Her terms would be about twenty-five guineas.’

Without a moment’s pause Paula returned for answer :—

‘The terms are quite satisfactory.’

Presently she heard the instrument again, and emerging from the next room in which she had passed the intervening time as before, she read :—

‘Miss Barbara Bell’s terms were accidentally understated. They would be forty guineas, in consequence of the distance. Am waiting at the office for a reply.’

Paula set to work as before and replied :—

‘Quite satisfactory ; only let her come at once.’

She did not leave the room this time, but went to

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an arrow-slit hard by and gazed out at the trees till the instrument began to speak again. Returning to it with a leisurely manner, implying a full persuasion that the matter was settled, she was somewhat surprised to learn that

‘Miss Bell, in stating her terms, understands that she will not be required to leave London till the middle of the afternoon. If it is necessary for her to leave at once, ten guineas extra would be indispensable, on account of the great inconvenience of such a short notice.’

Paula seemed a little vexed, but not much concerned she sent back with a readiness scarcely politic in the circumstances :—

‘She must start at once. Price agreed to.’

Her impatience for the answer was mixed with curiosity as to whether it was due to the agent or to Miss Barbara Bell that the prices had grown like Jack’s Bean-stalk in the negotiation. Another telegram duly came :—

‘Travelling expenses are expected to be paid.’

With decided impatience she dashed off :—

‘Of course ; but nothing more will be agreed to.’

Then, and only then, came the desired reply :—

‘Miss Bell starts by the twelve o’clock train.’

This business being finished, Paula left the chamber and descended into the inclosure called the Pleasance, a spot grassed down like a lawn. Here stood Somerset, who, having come down from the tower, was looking on while a man searched for old foundations under the sod

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with a crowbar. He was glad to see her at last, and noticed that she looked serene and relieved ; but could not for the moment divine the cause. Paula came nearer, returned his salutation, and regarded the man's operations in silence awhile till his work led him to a distance from them.

‘Do you still wish to consult me?’ asked Somerset.

‘About the building perhaps,’ said she. ‘Not about the play.’

‘But you said so?’

‘Yes ; but it will be unnecessary.’

Somerset thought this meant skittishness, and merely bowed.

‘You mistake me as usual,’ she said, in a low tone. ‘I am not going to consult you on that matter, because I have done all you could have asked for without consulting you. I take no part in the play to-night.’

‘Forgive my momentary doubt!’

‘Somebody else will play for me—an actress from London. But on no account must the substitution be known beforehand or the performance to-night will never come off: and that I should much regret.’

‘Captain De Stancy will not play his part if he knows you will not play yours—that’s what you mean?’

‘You may suppose it is,’ she said, smiling. ‘And to guard against this you must help me to keep the secret by being my confederate.’

To be Paula’s confederate ; to-day, indeed, time had brought him something worth waiting for. ‘In anything!’ cried Somerset.

‘Only in this!’ said she, with soft severity. ‘And you know what you have promised, George! And you remember there is to be no—what we talked about! Now will you go in the one-horse brougham to Markton Station this afternoon, and meet the four o’clock train? Inquire for a lady for Stancy Castle—a Miss

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Bell; see her safely into the carriage, and send her straight on here. I am particularly anxious that she should not enter the town, for I think she once came to Markton in a starring company, and she might be recognized, and my plan be defeated.'

Thus she instructed her lover and devoted friend; and when he could stay no longer he left her in the garden to return to his studio. As Somerset went in by the garden door he met a strange-looking personage coming out by the same passage—a stranger, with the manner of a Dutchman, the face of a smelter, and the clothes of an inhabitant of Guiana. The stranger, whom we have already seen sitting at the back of the theatre the night before, looked hard from Somerset to Paula, and from Paula again to Somerset, as he stepped out. Somerset had an unpleasant conviction that this queer gentleman had been standing for some time in the doorway unnoticed, quizzing him and his mistress as they talked together. If so he might have learnt a secret.

When he arrived upstairs, Somerset went to a window commanding a view of the garden. Paula still stood in her place, and the stranger was earnestly conversing with her. Soon they passed round the corner and disappeared.

It was now time for him to see about starting for Markton, an intelligible zest for circumventing the ardent and coercive captain of artillery saving him from any unnecessary delay in the journey. He was at the station ten minutes before the train was due; and when it drew up to the platform the first person to jump out was Captain De Stancy in sportsman's attire and with a gun in his hand. Somerset nodded, and De Stancy spoke, informing the architect that he had been ten miles up the line shooting waterfowl. 'That's Miss Power's carriage, I think,' he added.

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‘Yes,’ said Somerset carelessly. ‘She expects a friend, I believe. We shall see you at the castle again to-night?’

De Stancy assured him that they would, and the two men parted, Captain De Stancy, when he had glanced to see that the carriage was empty, going on to where a porter stood with a couple of spaniels.

Somerset now looked again to the train. While his back had been turned to converse with the captain, a lady of five-and-thirty had alighted from the identical compartment occupied by De Stancy. She made an inquiry about getting to Stancy Castle, upon which Somerset, who had not till now observed her, went forward, and introducing himself assisted her to the carriage and saw her safely off.

De Stancy had by this time disappeared, and Somerset walked on to his rooms at the Lord-Quantock-Arms, where he remained till he had dined, picturing the discomfiture of his alert rival when there should enter to him as Princess, not Paula Power, but Miss Bell of the Regent’s Theatre, London. Thus the hour passed, till he found that if he meant to see the issue of the plot it was time to be off.

On arriving at the castle, Somerset entered by the public door from the hall as before, a natural delicacy leading him to feel that though he might be welcomed as an ally at the stage-door—in other words, the door from the corridor—it was advisable not to take too ready an advantage of a privilege which, in the existing secrecy of his understanding with Paula, might lead to an overthrow of her plans on that point.

Not intending to sit out the whole performance, Somerset contented himself with standing in a window recess near the proscenium, whence he could observe both the stage and the front rows of spectators. He was quite uncertain whether Paula would appear among the audience to-night, and resolved to wait events.

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Just before the rise of the curtain the young lady in question entered and sat down. When the scenery was disclosed and the King of Navarre appeared, what was Somerset's surprise to find that, though the part was the part taken by De Stancy on the previous night, the voice was that of Mr. Mild; to him, at the appointed season, entered the Princess, namely, Miss Barbara Bell.

Before Somerset had recovered from his crestfallen sensation at De Stancy's elusiveness, that officer himself emerged in evening dress from behind a curtain forming a wing to the proscenium, and Somerset remarked that the minor part originally allotted to him was filled by the subaltern who had enacted it the night before. De Stancy glanced across, whether by accident or otherwise Somerset could not determine, and his glance seemed to say he quite recognized there had been a trial of wits between them, and that, thanks to his chance meeting with Miss Bell in the train, his had proved the stronger.

The house being less crowded to-night there were one or two vacant chairs in the best part. De Stancy, advancing from where he had stood for a few moments, seated himself comfortably beside Miss Power.

On the other side of her he now perceived the same queer elderly foreigner (as he appeared) who had come to her in the garden that morning. Somerset was surprised to perceive also that Paula with very little hesitation introduced him and De Stancy to each other. A conversation ensued between the three, none the less animated for being carried on in a whisper, in which Paula seemed on strangely intimate terms with the stranger, and the stranger to show feelings of great friendship for De Stancy, considering that they must be new acquaintances.

The play proceeded, and Somerset still lingered in his corner. He could not help fancying that De

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Stancy's ingenious relinquishment of his part, and its obvious reason, was winning Paula's admiration. His conduct was homage carried to unscrupulous and inconvenient lengths, a sort of thing which a woman may chide, but which she can never resent. Who could do otherwise than talk kindly to a man, incline a little to him, and condone his fault, when the sole motive of so audacious an exercise of his wits was to escape acting with any other heroine than herself.

His conjectures were brought to a pause by the ending of the comedy, and the opportunity afforded him of joining the group in front. The mass of people were soon gone, and the knot of friends assembled around Paula were discussing the merits and faults of the two days' performance.

'My uncle, Mr. Abner Power,' said Paula suddenly to Somerset, as he came near, presenting the stranger to the astonished young man. 'I could not see you before the performance, as I should have liked to do. The return of my uncle is so extraordinary that it ought to be told in a less hurried way than this. He has been supposed dead by all of us for nearly ten years—ever since the time we last heard from him.'

'For which I am to blame,' said Mr. Power, nodding to Paula's architect. 'Yet not I, but accident and a sluggish temperament. There are times, Mr. Somerset, when the human creature feels no interest in his kind, and assumes that his kind feels no interest in him. The feeling is not active enough to make him fly from their presence; but sufficient to keep him silent if he happens to be away. I may not have described it precisely; but this I know, that after my long illness, and the fancied neglect of my letters——'

'For which my father was not to blame, since he did not receive them,' said Paula.

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‘For which nobody was to blame—after that, I say, I wrote no more.’

‘You have much pleasure in returning at last, no doubt,’ said Somerset.

‘Sir, as I remained away without particular pain, so I return without particular joy. I speak the truth, and no compliments. I may add that there is one exception to this absence of feeling from my heart, namely, that I do derive great satisfaction from seeing how mightily this young woman has grown and prevailed.’

This address, though delivered nominally to Somerset, was listened to by Paula, Mrs. Goodman, and De Stancy also. After uttering it, the speaker turned away, and continued his previous conversation with Captain De Stancy. From this time till the group parted he never again spoke directly to Somerset, paying him barely so much attention as he might have expected as Paula’s architect, and certainly less than he might have supposed his due as her accepted lover.

The result of the appearance, as from the tomb, of this wintry man was that the evening ended in a frigid and formal way which gave little satisfaction to the sensitive Somerset, who was abstracted and constrained by reason of thoughts on how this resuscitation of the uncle would affect his relation with Paula. It was possibly also the thought of two at least of the others. There had, in truth, scarcely yet been time enough to adumbrate the possibilities opened up by this gentleman’s return.

The only private word exchanged by Somerset with any one that night was with Mrs. Goodman, in whom he always recognized a friend to his cause, though the fluidity of her character rendered her but a feeble one at the best of times. She informed him that Mr. Power had no sort of legal control over Paula, or direction in her estates; but Somerset could not doubt that a near

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and only blood relation, even had he possessed but half the static force of character that made itself apparent in Mr. Power, might exercise considerable moral influence over the girl if he chose. And in view of Mr. Power's marked preference for De Stancy, Somerset had many misgivings as to its operating in a direction favourable to himself.

XI

SOMERSET was deeply engaged with his draughtsmen and builders during the three following days, and scarcely entered the occupied wing of the castle.

At his suggestion Paula had agreed to have the works executed as such operations were carried out in old times, before the advent of contractors. Each trade required in the building was to be represented by a master-tradesman of that denomination, who should stand responsible for his own section of labour, and for no other, Somerset himself as chief technician working out his designs on the spot. By this means the thoroughness of the workmanship would be greatly increased in comparison with the modern arrangement, whereby a nominal builder, seldom present, who can certainly know no more than one trade intimately and well, and who often does not know that, undertakes the whole.

But notwithstanding its manifest advantages to the proprietor, the plan added largely to the responsibilities of the architect, who, with his master-mason, master-carpenter, master-plumber, and what not, had scarcely a moment to call his own. Still, the method being upon the face of it the true one, Somerset supervised with a will.

But there seemed to float across the court to him from the inhabited wing an intimation that things were

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not as they had been before ; that an influence adverse to himself was at work behind the ashlar'd face of inner wall which confronted him. Perhaps this was because he never saw Paula at the windows, or heard her footfall in that half of the building given over to himself and his myrmidons. There was really no reason other than a sentimental one why he should see her. The uninhabited part of the castle was almost an independent structure, and it was quite natural to exist for weeks in this wing without coming in contact with residents in the other.

A more pronounced cause than vague surmise was destined to perturb him, and this in an unexpected manner. It happened one morning that he glanced through a local paper while waiting at the Lord-Quantock-Arms for the pony-carriage to be brought round in which he often drove to the castle. The paper was two days old, but to his unutterable amazement he read therein a paragraph which ran as follows :—

‘We are informed that a marriage is likely to be arranged between Captain De Stancy, of the Royal Horse Artillery, only surviving son of Sir William De Stancy, Baronet, and Paula, only daughter of the late John Power, Esq., M.P., of Stancy Castle.’

Somerset dropped the paper, and stared out of the window. Fortunately for his emotions, the horse and carriage were at this moment brought to the door, so that nothing hindered Somerset in driving off to the spot at which he would be soonest likely to learn what truth or otherwise there was in the newspaper report. From the first he doubted it : and yet how should it have got there ? Such strange rumours, like paradoxical maxims, generally include a portion of truth. Five days had elapsed since he last spoke to Paula.

Reaching the castle he entered his own quarters as usual, and after setting the draughtsmen to work walked up and down pondering how he might best see her

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without making the paragraph the ground of his request for an interview ; for if it were a fabrication, such a reason would wound her pride in her own honour towards him, and if it were partly true, he would certainly do better in leaving her alone than in reproaching her. It would simply amount to a proof that Paula was an arrant coquette.

In his meditation he stood still, closely scanning one of the jamb-stones of a doorless entrance, as if to discover where the old hinge-hook had entered the stonework. He heard a footstep behind him, and looking round saw Paula standing by. She held a newspaper in her hand. The spot was one quite hemmed in from observation, a fact of which she seemed to be quite aware.

‘I have something to tell you,’ she said ; ‘something important. But you are so occupied with that old stone that I am obliged to wait.’

‘It is not true surely!’ he said, looking at the paper.

‘No, look here,’ she said, holding up the sheet. It was not what he had supposed, but a new one—the local rival to that which had contained the announcement, and was still damp from the press. She pointed, and he read—

‘We are authorized to state that there is no foundation whatever for the assertion of our contemporary that a marriage is likely to be arranged between Captain De Stancy and Miss Power of Stancy Castle.’

Somerset pressed her hand. ‘It disturbed me,’ he said, ‘though I did not believe it.’

‘It astonished me, as much as it disturbed you ; and I sent this contradiction at once.’

‘How could it have got there?’

She shook her head.

‘You have not the least knowledge?’

‘Not the least. I wish I had.’

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‘It was not from any friends of De Stancy’s? or himself?’

‘It was not. His sister has ascertained beyond doubt that he knew nothing of it. Well, now, don’t say any more to me about the matter.’

‘I’ll find out how it got into the paper.’

‘Not now—any future time will do. I have something else to tell you.’

‘I hope the news is as good as the last,’ he said, looking into her face with anxiety; for though that face was blooming, it seemed full of a doubt as to how her next information would be taken.

‘O yes; it is good, because everybody says so. We are going to take a delightful journey. My new-created uncle, as he seems, and I, and my aunt, and perhaps Charlotte, if she is well enough, are going to Nice, and other places about there.’

‘To Nice!’ said Somerset, rather blankly. ‘And I must stay here?’

‘Why, of course you must, considering what you have undertaken!’ she said, looking with saucy composure into his eyes. ‘My uncle’s reason for proposing the journey just now is, that he thinks the alterations will make residence here dusty and disagreeable during the spring. The opportunity of going with him is too good a one for us to lose, as I have never been there.’

‘I wish I was going to be one of the party! . . . What do *you* wish about it?’

She shook her head impenetrably. ‘A woman may wish some things she does not care to tell!’

‘Are you really glad you are going, dearest?—as I *must* call you just once,’ said the young man, gazing earnestly into her face, which struck him as looking far too rosy and radiant to be consistent with ever so little regret at leaving him behind.

‘I take great interest in foreign trips, especially to the shores of the Mediterranean: and everybody makes

a point of getting away when the house is turned out of the window.'

'But you do feel a little sadness, such as I should feel if our positions were reversed?'

'I think you ought not to have asked that so incredulously,' she murmured. 'We can be near each other in spirit, when our bodies are far apart, can we not?' Her tone grew softer and she drew a little closer to his side with a slightly nestling motion, as she went on, 'May I be sure that you will not think unkindly of me when I am absent from your sight, and not begrudge me any little pleasure because you are not there to share it with me?'

'May you! Can you ask it? . . . As for me, I shall have no pleasure to be begrudged or otherwise. The only pleasure I have is, as you well know, in you. When you are with me, I am happy: when you are away, I take no pleasure in anything.'

'I don't deserve it. I have no right to disturb you so,' she said, very gently. 'But I have given you some pleasure, have I not? A little more pleasure than pain, perhaps?'

'You have, and yet. . . . But I don't accuse you, dearest. Yes, you have given me pleasure. One truly pleasant time was when we stood together in the summer-house on the evening of the garden-party, and you said you liked me to love you.'

'Yes, it was a pleasant time,' she returned thoughtfully. 'How the rain came down, and formed a gauze between us and the dancers, did it not; and how afraid we were—at least I was—lest anybody should discover us there, and how quickly I ran in after the rain was over!'

'Yes,' said Somerset, 'I remember it. But no harm came of it to you. . . . And perhaps no good will come of it to me.'

'Do not be premature in your conclusions, sir,' she

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said archly. 'If you really do feel for me only half what you say, we shall—you will make good come of it—in some way or other.'

'Dear Paula—now I believe you, and can bear anything.'

'Then we will say no more ; because, as you recollect, we agreed not to go too far. No expostulations, for we are going to be practical young people ; besides, I won't listen if you utter them. I simply echo your words, and say I, too, believe you. Now I must go. Have faith in me, and don't magnify trifles light as air.'

'I *think* I understand you. And if I do, it will make a great difference in my conduct. You will have no cause to complain.'

'Then you must not understand me so much as to make much difference ; for your conduct as my architect is perfect. But I must not linger longer, though I wished you to know this news from my very own lips.'

'Bless you for it ! When do you leave ?'

'The day after to-morrow.'

'So early ? Does your uncle guess anything ? Do you wish him to be told just yet ?'

'Yes, to the first ; no, to the second.'

'I may write to you ?'

'On business, yes. It will be necessary.'

'How can you speak so at a time of parting ?'

'Now, George—you see I say George, and not Mr. Somerset, and you may draw your own inference—don't be so morbid in your reproaches ! I have informed you that you may write, or still better, telegraph, since the wire is so handy—on business. Well, of course, it is for you to judge whether you will add postscripts of another sort. There, you make me say more than a woman ought, because you are so obtuse and literal. Good afternoon—good-bye ! This will be my address.'

She handed him a slip of paper, and flitted away.

Though he saw her again after this, it was during the

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bustle of preparation, when there was always a third person present, usually in the shape of that breathing refrigerator, her uncle. Hence the few words that passed between them were of the most formal description, and chiefly concerned the restoration of the castle, and a church at Nice designed by him, which he wanted her to inspect.

They were to leave by an early afternoon train, and Somerset was invited to lunch on that day. The morning was occupied by a long business consultation in the studio with Mr. Power and Mrs. Goodman on what rooms were to be left locked up, what left in charge of the servants, and what thrown open to the builders and workmen under the surveillance of Somerset. At present the work consisted mostly of repairs to existing rooms, so as to render those habitable which had long been used only as stores for lumber. Paula did not appear during this discussion; but when they were all seated in the dining-hall she came in dressed for the journey, and, to outward appearance, with blithe anticipation at its prospect blooming from every feature. Next to her came Charlotte De Stancy, still with some of the pallor of an invalid, but wonderfully brightened up, as Somerset thought, by the prospect of a visit to a delightful shore. It might have been this; and it might have been that Somerset's presence had a share in the change.

It was in the hall, when they were in the bustle of leave-taking, that there occurred the only opportunity for the two or three private words with Paula to which his star treated him on that last day. His took the hasty form of, 'You will write soon?'

'Telegraphing will be quicker,' she answered in the same low tone; and whispering 'Be true to me!' turned away.

How unreasonable he was! In addition to those words, warm as they were, he would have preferred a little paleness of cheek, or trembling of lip, instead of

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the bloom and the beauty which sat upon her undisturbed maidenhood, to tell him that in some slight way she suffered at his loss.

Immediately after this they went to the carriages waiting at the door. Somerset, who had in a measure taken charge of the castle, accompanied them and saw them off, much as if they were his visitors. She stepped in, a general adieu was spoken, and she was gone.

While the carriages rolled away, he ascended to the top of the tower, where he saw them lessen to spots on the road, and turn the corner out of sight. The chances of a rival seemed to grow in proportion as Paula receded from his side; but he could not have answered why. He had bidden her and her relatives adieu on her own doorstep, like a privileged friend of the family, while De Stancy had scarcely seen her since the play-night. That the silence into which the captain appeared to have sunk was the placidity of conscious power, was scarcely probable; yet that adventitious aids existed for De Stancy he could not deny. The link formed by Charlotte between De Stancy and Paula, much as he liked the ingenuous girl, was one that he could have wished away. It constituted a bridge of access to Paula's inner life and feelings which nothing could rival; except that one fact which, as he firmly believed, did actually rival it, giving him faith and hope; his own primary occupation of Paula's heart. Moreover, Mrs. Goodman would be an influence favourable to himself and his cause during the journey; though, to be sure, to set against her there was the phlegmatic and obstinate Abner Power, in whom, apprised by those subtle media of intelligence which lovers possess, he fancied he saw no friend.

Somerset remained but a short time at the castle that day. The light of its chambers had fled, the gross grandeur of the dictatorial towers oppressed him, and the studio was hateful. He remembered a promise made long ago to Mr. Woodwell of calling upon him

some afternoon ; and a visit which had not much attractiveness in it at other times recommended itself now, through being the one possible way open to him of hearing Paula named and her doings talked of. Hence in walking back to Markton, instead of going up the High Street, he turned aside into the unfrequented foot-way that led to the minister's cottage.

Mr. Woodwell was not indoors at the moment of his call, and Somerset lingered at the doorway, and cast his eyes around. It was a house which typified the drearier tenets of its occupier with great exactness. It stood upon its spot of earth without any natural union with it : no mosses disguised the stiff straight line where wall met earth ; not a creeper softened the aspect of the bare front. The garden walk was strewn with loose clinkers from the neighbouring foundry, which rolled under the pedestrian's foot and jolted his soul out of him before he reached the porchless door. But all was clean, and clear, and dry.

Whether Mr. Woodwell was personally responsible for this condition of things there was not time to closely consider, for Somerset perceived the minister coming up the walk towards him. Mr. Woodwell welcomed him heartily ; and yet with the mien of a man whose mind has scarcely dismissed some scene which has preceded the one that confronts him. What that scene was soon transpired.

'I have had a busy afternoon,' said the minister, as they walked indoors ; 'or rather an exciting afternoon. Your client at Stancy Castle, whose uncle, as I imagine you know, has so unexpectedly returned, has left with him to-day for the south of France ; and I wished to ask her before her departure some questions as to how a charity organized by her father was to be administered in her absence. But I have been very unfortunate. She could not find time to see me at her own house, and I awaited her at the station, all to no purpose,

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owing to the presence of her friends. Well, well, I must see if a letter will find her.'

Somerset asked if anybody of the neighbourhood was there to see them off.

'Yes, that was the trouble of it. Captain De Stancy was there, and quite monopolized her. I don't know what 'tis coming to, and perhaps I have no business to inquire, since she is scarcely a member of our church now. Who could have anticipated the daughter of my old friend John Power developing into the ordinary gay woman of the world as she has done? Who could have expected her to associate with people who show contempt for their Maker's intentions by flippantly assuming other characters than those in which He created them?'

'You mistake her,' murmured Somerset, in a voice which he vainly endeavoured to attune to philosophy. 'Miss Power has some very rare and beautiful qualities in her nature, though I confess I tremble—fear lest the De Stancy influence should be too strong.'

'Sir, it is already! Do you remember my telling you that I thought the force of her surroundings would obscure the pure daylight of her spirit, as a monkish window of coloured images attenuates the rays of God's sun? I do not wish to indulge in rash surmises, but her oscillation from her family creed of Calvinistic truth towards the traditions of the De Stancys has been so decided, though so gradual, that—well, I may be wrong.'

'That what?' said the young man sharply.

'I sometimes think she will take to her as husband the present representative of that impoverished line—Captain De Stancy—which she may easily do, if she chooses, as his behaviour to-day showed.'

'He was probably there on account of his sister,' said Somerset, trying to escape the mental picture of farewell gallantries bestowed on Paula.

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‘It was hinted at in the papers the other day.’

‘And it was flatly contradicted.’

‘Yes. Well, we shall see in the Lord’s good time; I can do no more for her. And now, Mr. Somerset, pray take a cup of tea.’

The revelations of the minister depressed Somerset a little, and he did not stay long. As he went to the door Woodwell said, ‘There is a worthy man—the deacon of our chapel, Mr. Havill—who would like to be friendly with you. Poor man, since the death of his wife he seems to have something on his mind—some trouble which my words will not reach. If ever you are passing his door, please give him a look in. He fears that calling on you might be an intrusion.’

Somerset did not clearly promise, and went his way. The minister’s allusion to the announcement of the marriage reminded Somerset that she had expressed a wish to know how the paragraph came to be inserted. The wish had been carelessly spoken; but he went to the newspaper office to make inquiries on the point.

The reply was unexpected. The reporter informed his questioner that in returning from the theatricals, at which he was present, he shared a fly with a gentleman who assured him that such an alliance was certain, so obviously did it recommend itself to all concerned, as a means of strengthening both families. The gentleman’s knowledge of the Powers was so precise that the reporter did not hesitate to accept his assertion. He was a man who had seen a great deal of the world, and his face was noticeable for the seams and scars on it.

Somerset recognized Paula’s uncle in the portrait.

Hostilities, then, were beginning. The paragraph had been meant as the first slap. Taking her abroad was the second.

BOOK THE FOURTH

SOMERSET, DARE, AND DE STANCY

BOOK THE FOURTH

SOMERSET, DARE, AND DE STANCY

I

THERE was no part of Paula's journey in which Somerset did not think of her. He imagined her in the hotel at Havre, in her brief rest at Paris; her drive past the Place de la Bastille to the Boulevard Mazas to take the train for Lyons; her tedious progress through the dark of a winter night till she crossed the isothermal line which told of the beginning of a southern atmosphere, and onwards to the ancient blue sea.

Thus, between the hours devoted to architecture, he passed the next three days. One morning he set himself, by the help of John, to practise on the telegraph instrument, expecting a message. But though he watched the machine at every opportunity, or kept some other person on the alert in its neighbourhood, no message arrived to gratify him till after the lapse of nearly a fortnight. Then she spoke from her new habitation nine hundred miles away, in these meagre words:—

'Are settled at the address given. Can now attend to any inquiry about the building.'

The pointed implication that she could attend to

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inquiries about nothing else, breathed of the veritable Paula so distinctly that he could forgive its sauciness. His reply was soon despatched:—

‘Will write particulars of our progress. Always the same.’

The last three words formed the sentimental appendage which she had assured him she could tolerate, and which he hoped she might desire.

He spent the remainder of the day in making a little sketch to show what had been done in the castle since her departure. This he despatched with a letter of explanation ending in a paragraph of a different tenor:—

‘I have demonstrated our progress as well as I could; but another subject has been in my mind, even whilst writing the former. Ask yourself if you use me well in keeping me a fortnight before you so much as say that you have arrived? The one thing that reconciled me to your departure was the thought that I should hear early from you: my idea of being able to submit to your absence was based entirely upon that.

‘But I have resolved not to be out of humour, and to believe that your scheme of reserve is not unreasonable; neither do I quarrel with your injunction to keep silence to all relatives. I do not know anything I can say to show you more plainly my acquiescence in your wish “not to go too far” (in short, to keep yourself dear—by dear I mean not cheap—you have been dear in the other sense a long time, as you know), than by not urging you to go a single degree further in warmth than you please.’

When this was posted he again turned his attention to her walls and towers, which indeed were a dumb consolation in many ways for the lack of herself. There was no nook in the castle to which he had not access or could not easily obtain access by applying for the keys, and this propinquity of things belonging to her served to keep her image before him even more constantly than his memories would have done.

Three days and a half after the despatch of his

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subdued effusion the telegraph called to tell him the good news that

‘Your letter and drawing are just received. Thanks for the latter. Will reply to the former by post this afternoon.’

It was with cheerful patience that he attended to his three draughtsmen in the studio, or walked about the environs of the fortress during the fifty hours spent by her presumably tender missive on the road. A light fleece of snow fell during the second night of waiting, inverting the position of long-established lights and shades, and lowering to a dingy grey the approximately white walls of other weathers; he could trace the post-man’s footmarks as he entered over the bridge, knowing them by the dot of his walking-stick: on entering the expected letter was waiting upon his table. He looked at its direction with glad curiosity; it was the first letter he had ever received from her.

‘HÔTEL —, NICE, *Feb. 14.*

‘MY DEAR MR. SOMERSET’ (the ‘George,’ then, to which she had so kindly treated him in her last conversation, was not to be continued in black and white),—

‘Your letter explaining the progress of the work, aided by the sketch enclosed, gave me as clear an idea of the advance made since my departure as I could have gained by being present. I feel every confidence in you, and am quite sure the restoration is in good hands. In this opinion both my aunt and my uncle coincide. Please act entirely on your own judgment in everything, and as soon as you give a certificate to the builders for the first instalment of their money it will be promptly sent by my solicitors.

‘You bid me ask myself if I have used you well in not sending intelligence of myself till a fortnight after I had left you. Now, George, don’t be unreasonable! Let me remind you that, as a certain apostle said, there are a thousand things lawful which are not expedient. I say this, not from pride in my own conduct, but to offer you a very fair explanation of it. Your resolve not to be out of humour with me suggests that you have been sorely tempted that way, else why should such a resolve have been necessary?

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‘If you only knew what passes in my mind sometimes you would perhaps not be so ready to blame. Shall I tell you? No. For, if it is a great emotion, it may afford you a cruel satisfaction at finding I suffer through separation; and if it be a growing indifference to you, it will be inflicting gratuitous unhappiness upon you to say so, if you care for me; as I *sometimes* think you may do *a little*.’

(‘O, Paula!’ said Somerset.)

‘Please which way would you have it? But it is better that you should guess at what I feel than that you should distinctly know it. Notwithstanding this assertion you will, I know, adhere to your first prepossession in favour of prompt confessions. In spite of that, I fear that upon trial such promptness would not produce that happiness which your fancy leads you to expect. Your heart would weary in time, and when once that happens, good-bye to the emotion you have told me of. Imagine such a case clearly and you will perceive the probability of what I say. At the same time I admit that a woman who is *only* a creature of evasions and disguises is very disagreeable.

‘Do not write *very* frequently, and never write at all unless you have some real information about the castle works to communicate. I will explain to you on another occasion why I make this request. You will possibly set it down as additional evidence of my cold-heartedness. If so you must. Would you also mind writing the business letter on an independent sheet, with a proper beginning and ending? Whether you inclose another sheet is of course optional.—Sincerely yours,

PAULA POWER.’

Somerset had a suspicion that her order to him not to neglect the business letter was to escape any invidious remarks from her uncle. He wished she would be more explicit, so that he might know exactly how matters stood with them, and whether Abner Power had ever ventured to express disapproval of him as her lover.

But not knowing, he waited anxiously for a new architectural event on which he might legitimately send her another line. This occurred about a week later, when the men engaged in digging foundations dis-

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covered remains of old ones which warranted a modification of the original plan. He accordingly sent off his professional advice on the point, requesting her assent or otherwise to the amendment, winding up the inquiry with 'Yours faithfully.' On another sheet he wrote:—

'Do you suffer from any unpleasantness in the manner of others on account of me? If so, inform me, Paula. I cannot otherwise interpret your request for the separate sheets. While on this point I will tell you what I have learnt relative to the authorship of that false paragraph about your engagement. It was communicated to the paper by your uncle. Was the wish father to the thought, or could he have been misled, as many were, by appearances at the theatricals?

'If I am not to write to you without a professional reason, surely you can write to me without such an excuse? When you write tell me of yourself. There is nothing I so much wish to hear of. Write a great deal about your daily doings, for my mind's eye keeps those sweet operations more distinctly before me than my bodily sight does my own.

'You say nothing of having been to look at the chapel-of-ease I told you of, the plans of which I made when an architect's pupil, working in mètres instead of feet and inches, to my immense perplexity, that the drawings might be understood by the foreign workmen. Go there and tell me what you think of its design. I can assure you that every curve thereof is my own.

'How I wish you would invite me to run over and see you, if only for a day or two, for my heart runs after you in a most distracted manner. Dearest, you entirely fill my life! But I forget; we have resolved not to go *very far*. But the fact is I am half afraid lest, with such reticence, you should not remember how *very much* I am yours, and with what a dogged constancy I shall always remember you. Paula, sometimes I have horrible misgivings that something will divide us, especially if we do not make a more distinct show of our true relationship. True do I say? I mean the relationship which I think exists between us, but which you do not affirm too clearly.—Yours always.'

Away southward like the swallow went the tender lines. He wondered if she would notice his hint of

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being ready to pay her a flying visit, if permitted to do so. His fancy dwelt on that further side of France, the very contours of whose shore were now lines of beauty for him. He prowled in the library, and found interest in the mustiest facts relating to that place, learning with æsthetic pleasure that the number of its population was fifty thousand, that the mean temperature of its atmosphere was 60° Fahrenheit, and that the peculiarities of a mistral were far from agreeable.

He waited over long for her reply; but it ultimately came. After the usual business preliminary, she said:—

‘As requested, I have visited the little church you designed. It gave me great pleasure to stand before a building whose outline and details had come from the brain of such a valued friend and adviser.’

(‘Valued friend and adviser,’ repeated Somerset critically.)

‘I like the style much, especially that of the windows—Early English are they not? I am going to attend service there next Sunday, *because you were the architect, and for no godly reason at all*. Does that content you? Fie for your despondency! Remember M. Aurelius: “This is the chief thing: Be not perturbed; for all things are of the nature of the Universal.” Indeed I am a little surprised at your having forebodings, after my assurance to you before I left. I have none. My opinion is that, to be happy, it is best to think that, as we are the product of events, events will continue to produce that which is in harmony with us. . . . You are too faint-hearted, and that’s the truth of it. I advise you not to abandon yourself to idolatry too readily; you know what I mean. It fills me with remorse when I think how very far below such a position my actual worth removes me.

‘I should like to receive another letter from you as soon as you have got over the misgiving you speak of, but don’t write too soon. I wish I could write anything to raise your spirits, but you may be so perverse that if, in order to do this, I tell you of the races, routs, scenery, gaieties, and gambling going on in this place and neighbourhood (into which of course I cannot help being a little drawn),

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you may declare that my words make you worse than ever. Don't pass the line I have set down in the way you were tempted to do in your last ; and not too many Dearests—at least as yet. This is not a time for effusion. You have my very warm affection, and that's enough for the present.'

As a love-letter this missive was tantalizing enough, but since its form was simply a continuation of what she had practised before she left, it produced no undue misgiving in him. Far more was he impressed by her omitting to answer the two important questions he had put to her. First, concerning her uncle's attitude towards them, and his conduct in giving such strange information to the reporter. Second, on his, Somerset's, paying her a flying visit some time during the spring. Since she had requested it, he made no haste in his reply. When penned, it ran in the words subjoined, which, in common with every line of their correspondence, acquired from the strangeness of subsequent circumstances an interest and a force that perhaps they did not intrinsically possess.

'People cannot' (he wrote) 'be for ever in good spirits on this gloomy side of the Channel, even though you seem to be so on yours. However, that I can abstain from letting you know whether my spirits are good or otherwise, I will prove in our future correspondence. I admire you more and more, both for the warm feeling towards me which I firmly believe you have, and for your ability to maintain side by side with it so much dignity and resolution with regard to foolish sentiment. Sometimes I think I could have put up with a little more weakness if it had brought with it a little more tenderness, but I dismiss all that when I mentally survey your other qualities. I have thought of fifty things to say to you of the *too far* sort, not one of any other ; so that your prohibition is very unfortunate, for by it I am doomed to say things that do not rise spontaneously to my lips. You say that our shut-up feelings are not to be mentioned yet. How long is the yet to last ?

'But, to speak more solemnly, matters grow very serious with us, Paula—at least with me : and there are times when this restraint is really unbearable. It is possible to put up with reserve when the

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reserved being is by one's side, for the eyes may reveal what the lips do not. But when she is absent, what was piquancy becomes harshness, tender railleries become cruel sarcasm, and tacit understandings misunderstandings. However that may be, you shall never be able to reproach me for touchiness. I still esteem you as a friend ; I admire you and love you as a woman. This I shall always do, however unconfiding you prove.'

II

WITHOUT knowing it, Somerset was drawing near to a crisis in this soft correspondence which would speedily put his assertions to the test ; but the knowledge came upon him soon enough for his peace.

Her next letter, dated March 9th, was the shortest of all he had received, and beyond the portion devoted to the building-works it contained only the following sentences :—

‘I am almost angry with you, George, for being vexed because I am not more effusive. Why should the verbal *I love you* be ever uttered between two beings of opposite sex who have eyes to see signs? During the seven or eight months that we have known each other, you have discovered my regard for you, and what more can you desire? Would a reiterated assertion of passion really do any good? Remember it is a natural instinct with us women to retain the power of obliging a man to hope, fear, pray, and beseech as long as we think fit, before we confess to a reciprocal affection.

‘I am now going to own to a weakness about which I had intended to keep silent. It will not perhaps add to your respect for me. My uncle, whom in many ways I like, is displeased with me for keeping up this correspondence so regularly. I am quite perverse enough to venture to disregard his feelings ; but considering the relationship, and his kindness in other respects, I should prefer not to do so at present. Honestly speaking, I want the courage to resist him in some things. He said to me the other day that he was very much surprised that I did not depend upon his judgment for my future happiness. Whether that meant much or little, I have resolved to communicate with you only by telegrams for the re-

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mainder of the time we are here. Please reply by the same means only. There, now, don't flush and call me names! It is for the best, and we want no nonsense, you and I. Dear George, I feel more than I say, and if I do not speak more plainly, you will understand what is behind after all I have hinted. I can promise you that you will not like me less upon knowing me better. Hope ever. I would give up a good deal for you. Good-bye !'

This brought Somerset some cheerfulness and a good deal of gloom. He silently reproached her, who was apparently so independent, for lacking independence in such a vital matter. Perhaps it was mere sex, perhaps it was peculiar to a few, that her independence and courage, like Cleopatra's, failed her occasionally at the last moment.

One curious impression which had often haunted him now returned with redoubled force. He could not see himself as the husband of Paula Power in any likely future. He could not imagine her his wife. People were apt to run into mistakes in their presentiments; but though he could picture her as queening it over him, as avowing her love for him unreservedly, even as compromising herself for him, he could not see her in a state of domesticity with him.

Telegrams being commanded, to the telegraph he repaired, when, after two days, an immediate wish to communicate with her led him to dismiss vague conjecture on the future situation. His first telegram took the following form :—

'I give up the letter writing. I will part with anything to please you but yourself. Your comfort with your relative is the first thing to be considered : not for the world do I wish you to make divisions within doors. Yours.'

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday passed, and on Saturday a telegram came in reply :—

'I can fear, grieve at, and complain of nothing, having your nice promise to consider my comfort always.'

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This was very pretty ; but it admitted little. Such short messages were in themselves poor substitutes for letters, but their speed and easy frequency were good qualities which the letters did not possess. Three days later he replied :—

‘You do not once say to me “Come.” Would such a strange accident as my arrival disturb you much?’

She replied rather quickly :—

‘I am indisposed to answer you too clearly. Keep your heart strong : ’tis a censorious world.’

The vagueness there shown made Somerset peremptory, and he could not help replying somewhat more impetuously than usual :—

‘Why do you give me so much cause for anxiety ! Why treat me to so much mystification ! Say once, distinctly, that what I have asked is given.’

He awaited for the answer, one day, two days, a week ; but none came. It was now the end of March, and when Somerset walked of an afternoon by the river and pool in the lower part of the grounds, his ear newly greeted by the small voices of frogs and toads and other creatures who had been torpid through the winter, he became doubtful and uneasy that she alone should be silent in the awakening year.

He waited through a second week, and there was still no reply. It was possible that the urgency of his request had tempted her to punish him, and he continued his walks, to, fro, and around, with as close an ear to the undertones of nature, and as attentive an eye to the charms of his own art, as the grand passion would allow. Now came the days of battle between winter and spring. On these excursions, though spring

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was to the forward during the daylight, winter would reassert itself at night, and not unfrequently at other moments. Tepid airs and nipping breezes met on the confines of sunshine and shade; trembling raindrops that were still akin to frost crystals dashed themselves from the bushes as he pursued his way from town to castle; the birds were like an orchestra waiting for the signal to strike up, and colour began to enter into the country round.

But he gave only a modicum of thought to these proceedings. He rather thought such things as, 'She can afford to be saucy, and to find a source of blitheness in my love, considering the power that wealth gives her to pick and choose almost where she will.' He was bound to own, however, that one of the charms of her conversation was the complete absence of the note of the heiress from its accents. That, other things equal, her interest would naturally incline to a person bearing the name of De Stancy, was evident from her avowed predilections. His original assumption, that she was a personification of the modern spirit, who had been dropped, like a seed from the bill of a bird, into a chink of mediævalism, required some qualification. Romanticism, which will exist in every human breast as long as human nature itself exists, had asserted itself in her. Veneration for things old, not because of any merit in them, but because of their long continuance, had developed in her; and her modern spirit was taking to itself wings and flying away. Whether his image was flying with the other was a question which moved him all the more deeply now that her silence gave him dread of an affirmative answer.

For another seven days he stoically left in suspension all forecasts of his possibly grim fate in being the employed and not the beloved. The week passed: he telegraphed: there was no reply: he had sudden fears

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for her personal safety and resolved to break her command by writing.

‘STANCY CASTLE, *April 13.*

‘DEAR PAULA,—Are you ill or in trouble? It is impossible in the very unquiet state you have put me into by your silence that I should abstain from writing. Without affectation, you sorely distress me, and I think you would hardly have done it could you know what a degree of anxiety you cause. Why, Paula, do you not write or send to me? What have I done that you should treat me like this? Do write, if it is only to reproach me. I am compelled to pass the greater part of the day in this castle, which reminds me constantly of you, and yet eternally lacks your presence. I am unfortunate indeed that you have not been able to find half-an-hour during the last month to tell me at least that you are alive.

‘You have always been ambiguous, it is true; but I thought I saw encouragement in your eyes; encouragement certainly was in your eyes, and who would not have been deluded by them and have believed them sincere? Yet what tenderness can there be in a heart that can cause me pain so wilfully!

‘There may, of course, be some deliberate scheming on the part of your relations to intercept our letters; but I cannot think it. I know that the housekeeper has received a letter from your aunt this very week, in which she incidentally mentions that all are well, and in the same place as before. How then can I excuse you?

‘Then write, Paula, or at least telegraph, as you proposed. Otherwise I am resolved to take your silence as a signal to treat your fair words as wind, and to write to you no more.’

III

HE despatched the letter, and half-an-hour afterwards felt sure that it would mortally offend her. But he had now reached a state of temporary indifference, and could contemplate the loss of such a tantalizing property with reasonable calm.

In the interim of waiting for a reply he was one day walking to Markton, when, passing Myrtle Villa, he saw Sir William De Stancy ambling about his garden-path and examining the crocuses that palisaded its edge. Sir William saw him and asked him to come in. Somerset was in the mood for any diversion from his own affairs, and they seated themselves by the drawing-room fire.

‘I am much alone now,’ said Sir William, ‘and if the weather were not very mild, so that I can get out into the garden every day, I should feel it a great deal.’

‘You allude to your daughter’s absence?’

‘And my son’s. Strange to say, I do not miss her so much as I miss him. She offers to return at any moment; but I do not wish to deprive her of the advantages of a little foreign travel with her friend. Always, Mr. Somerset, give your spare time to foreign countries, especially those which contrast with your own in topography, language, and art. That’s my advice to all young people of your age. Don’t waste your money

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on expensive amusements at home. Practise the strictest economy at home, to have a margin for going abroad.'

Economy, which Sir William had never practised, but to which, after exhausting all other practices, he now raised an altar, as the Athenians did to the unknown God, was a topic likely to prolong itself on the baronet's lips, and Somerset contrived to interrupt him by asking—

'Captain De Stancy, too, has gone? Has the artillery, then, left the barracks?'

'No,' said Sir William. 'But my son has made use of his leave in running over to see his sister at Nice.'

The current of quiet meditation in Somerset changed to a busy whirl at this reply. That Paula should become indifferent to his existence from a sense of superiority, physical, spiritual, or social, was a sufficiently ironical thing; but that she should have relinquished him because of the presence of a rival lent commonplace dreariness to her cruelty.

Sir William, noting nothing, continued in the tone of clever childishness which characterized him: 'It is very singular how the present situation has been led up to by me. Policy, and policy alone, has been the rule of my conduct for many years past; and when I say that I have saved my family by it, I believe time will show that I am within the truth. I hope you don't let your passions outrun your policy, as so many young men are apt to do. Better be poor and politic, than rich and headstrong: that's the opinion of an old man. However, I was going to say that it was purely from policy that I allowed a friendship to develop between my daughter and Miss Power, and now events are proving the wisdom of my course. Straws show how the wind blows, and there are little signs that my son Captain De Stancy will return to Stancy Castle by the

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fortunate step of marrying its owner. I say nothing to either of them, and they say nothing to me; but my wisdom lies in doing nothing to hinder such a consummation, despite inherited prejudices.'

Somerset had quite time enough to rein himself in during the old gentleman's locution, and the voice in which he answered was so cold and reckless that it did not seem his own: 'But how will they live happily together when she is a Dissenter, and a Radical, and a New-light, and a Neo-Greek, and a person of red blood; while Captain De Stancy is the reverse of them all!'

'I anticipate no difficulty on that score,' said the baronet. 'My son's star lies in that direction, and, like the Magi, he is following it without trifling with his opportunity. You have skill in architecture, therefore you follow it. My son has skill in gallantry, and now he is about to exercise it profitably.'

'May nobody wish him more harm in that exercise than I do!' said Somerset fervently.

A stagnant moodiness of several hours which followed his visit to Myrtle Villa resulted in a resolve to journey over to Paula the very next day. He now felt perfectly convinced that the inviting of Captain De Stancy to visit them at Nice was a second stage in the scheme of Paula's uncle, the premature announcement of her marriage having been the first. The roundness and neatness of the whole plan could not fail to recommend it to the mind which delighted in putting involved things straight, and such a mind Abner Power's seemed to be. In fact, the felicity, in a politic sense, of pairing the captain with the heiress furnished no little excuse for manœuvring to bring it about, so long as that manœuvring fell short of unfairness, which Mr. Power's could scarcely be said to do.

The next day was spent in furnishing the builders with such instructions as they might require for a

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coming week or ten days, and in dropping a short note to Paula ; ending as follows :—

‘ I am coming to see you. Possibly you will refuse me an interview. Never mind, I am coming.—Yours, G. SOMERSET.’

The morning after that he was up and away. Between him and Paula stretched nine hundred miles by the line of journey that he found it necessary to adopt, namely, the way of London, in order to inform his father of his movements and to make one or two business calls. The afternoon was passed in attending to these matters, the night in speeding onward, and by the time that nine o’clock sounded next morning through the sunless and leaden air of the English Channel coasts, he had reduced the number of miles on his list by two hundred, and cut off the sea from the impediments between him and Paula.

On awakening from a fitful sleep in the grey dawn of the morning following he looked out upon Lyons, quiet enough now, the citizens unaroused to the daily round of bread-winning, and enveloped in a haze of fog.

Six hundred and fifty miles of his journey had been got over ; there still intervened two hundred and fifty between him and the end of suspense. When he thought of that he was disinclined to pause ; and pressed on by the same train, which set him down at Marseilles at mid-day.

Here he considered. By going on to Nice that afternoon he would arrive at too late an hour to call upon her the same evening : it would therefore be advisable to sleep in Marseilles and proceed the next morning to his journey’s end, so as to meet her in a brighter condition than he could boast of to-day. This he accordingly did, and leaving Marseilles the next morning about eight, found himself at Nice early in the afternoon.

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Now that he was actually at the centre of his gravitation he seemed even further away from a feasible meeting with her than in England. While afar off, his presence at Nice had appeared to be the one thing needful for the solution of his trouble, but the very house fronts seemed now to ask him what right he had there. Unluckily, in writing from England, he had not allowed her time to reply before his departure, so that he did not know what difficulties might lie in the way of her seeing him privately. Before deciding what to do, he walked down the Avenue de la Gare to the promenade between the shore and the Jardin Public, and sat down to think.

The hotel which she had given him as her address looked right out upon him and the sea beyond, and he rested there with the pleasing hope that her eyes might glance from a window and discover his form. Everything in the scene was sunny and gay. Behind him in the gardens a band was playing; before him was the sea, the Great sea, the historical and original Mediterranean; the sea of innumerable characters in history and legend that arranged themselves before him in a long frieze of memories so diverse as to include both Æneas and St. Paul.

Northern eyes are not prepared on a sudden for the impact of such images of warmth and colour as meet them southward, or for the vigorous light that falls from the sky of this favoured shore. In any other circumstances the transparency and serenity of the air, the perfume of the sea, the radiant houses, the palms and flowers, would have acted upon Somerset as an enchantment, and wrapped him in a reverie; but at present he only saw and felt these things as through a thick glass which kept out half their atmosphere.

At last he made up his mind. He would take up his quarters at her hotel, and catch echoes of her and her people, to learn somehow if their attitude towards him as a lover were actually hostile, before formally

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encountering them. Under this crystalline light, full of gaieties, sentiment, languor, seductiveness, and ready-made romance, the memory of a solitary unimportant man in the lugubrious North might have faded from her mind. He was only her hired designer. He was an artist; but he had been engaged by her, and was not a volunteer; and she did not as yet know that he meant to accept no return for his labours but the pleasure of presenting them to her as a love-offering.

So off he went at once towards the imposing building whither his letters had preceded him. Owing to a press of visitors there was a moment's delay before he could be attended to at the bureau, and he turned to the large staircase that confronted him, momentarily hoping that her figure might descend. Her skirts must indeed have brushed the carpeting of those steps scores of times. He engaged his room, ordered his luggage to be sent for, and finally inquired for the party he sought.

'They left Nice yesterday, monsieur,' replied madame.

Was she quite sure, Somerset asked her?

Yes, she was quite sure. Two of the hotel carriages had driven them to the station.

Did she know where they had gone to?

This and other inquiries resulted in the information that they had gone to the hotel at Monte Carlo; that how long they were going to stay there, and whether they were coming back again, was not known. His final question whether Miss Power had received a letter from England which must have arrived the day previous was answered in the affirmative.

Somerset's first and sudden resolve was to follow on after them to the hotel named; but he finally decided to make his immediate visit to Monte Carlo only a cautious reconnoitre, returning to Nice to sleep.

Accordingly, after an early dinner, he again set forth through the broad Avenue de la Gare, and an hour on the coast railway brought him to the beautiful and

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sinister little spot to which the Power and De Stancy party had strayed in common with the rest of the frivolous throng.

He assumed that their visit thither would be chiefly one of curiosity, and therefore not prolonged. This proved to be the case in even greater measure than he had anticipated. On inquiry at the hotel he learnt that they had stayed only one night, leaving a short time before his arrival, though it was believed that some of the party were still in the town.

In a state of indecision Somerset strolled into the gardens of the Casino, and looked out upon the sea. There it still lay, calm yet lively; of an unmixed blue, yet variegated; hushed, but articulate even to melodiousness. Everything about and around this coast appeared indeed jaunty, tuneful, and at ease, reciprocating with heartiness the rays of the splendid sun; everything, except himself. The palms and flowers on the terraces before him were undisturbed by a single cold breath. The marble work of parapets and steps was unsplintered by frosts. The whole was like a conservatory with the sky for its dome.

For want of other occupation he went round towards the public entrance to the Casino, and ascended the great staircase into the pillared hall. It was possible, after all, that upon leaving the hotel and sending on their luggage they had taken another turn through the rooms, to follow by a later train. With more than curiosity he scanned first the reading-rooms, only however to see not a face that he knew. He then crossed the vestibule to the gaming-tables.

IV

HERE he was confronted by a heated phantasmagoria of tainted splendour and a high pressure of suspense that seemed to make the air quiver. A low whisper of conversation prevailed, which might probably have been not wrongly defined as the lowest note of social harmony.

The people gathered at this negative pole of industry had come from all civilized countries; their tongues were familiar with many forms of utterance, that of each racial group or type being unintelligible in its subtler variations, if not entirely, to the rest. But the language of *meum* and *tuum* they collectively comprehended without translation. In a half-charmed spell-bound state they had congregated in knots, standing, or sitting in hollow circles round the notorious oval tables marked with figures and lines. The eyes of all these sets of people were watching the Roulette. Somerset went from table to table, looking among the loungers rather than among the regular players, for faces, or at least for one face, which did not meet his gaze.

The suggestive charm which the centuries-old impersonality Gaming, rather than games and gamesters, had for Somerset, led him to loiter on even when his hope of meeting any of the Power and De Stancy party had vanished. As a non-participant in its profits and losses,

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fevers and frenzies, it had that stage effect upon his imagination which is usually exercised over those who behold Chance presented to them with spectacular piquancy without advancing far enough in its acquaintance to suffer from its ghastly reprisals and impish tricks. He beheld a hundred diametrically opposed wishes issuing from the murky intelligences around a table, and spreading down across each other upon the figured diagram in their midst, each to its own number. It was a network of hopes; which at the announcement, 'Sept, Rouge, Impair, et Manque,' disappeared like magic gossamer, to be replaced in a moment by new. That all the people there, including himself, could be interested in what to the eye of perfect reason was a somewhat monotonous thing—the property of numbers to recur at certain longer or shorter intervals in a machine containing them—in other words, the blind groping after fractions of a result the whole of which was well known—was one testimony among many of the powerlessness of logic when confronted with imagination.

At this juncture our loungeer discerned at one of the tables about the last person in the world he could have wished to encounter there. It was Dare, whom he had supposed to be a thousand miles off, hanging about the purlieus of Markton.

Dare was seated beside a table in an attitude of application which seemed to imply that he had come early and engaged in this pursuit in a systematic manner. Somerset had never witnessed Dare and De Stancy together, neither had he heard of any engagement of Dare by the travelling party as artist, courier, or otherwise; and yet it crossed his mind that Dare might have had something to do with them, or at least have seen them. This possibility was enough to overmaster Somerset's reluctance to speak to the young man, and he did so as soon as an opportunity occurred.

Dare's face was as rigid and dry as if it had been

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encrusted with plaster, and he was like one turned into a computing machine which no longer had the power of feeling. He recognized Somerset as indifferently as if he had met him in the ward of Stancy Castle, and replying to his remarks by a word or two, concentrated on the game anew.

‘Are you here alone?’ said Somerset presently.

‘Quite alone.’ There was a silence, till Dare added, ‘But I have seen some friends of yours.’ He again became absorbed in the events of the table. Somerset retreated a few steps, and pondered the question whether Dare could know where they had gone. He disliked to be beholden to Dare for information, but he would give a great deal to know. While pausing he watched Dare’s play. He staked only five-franc pieces, but it was done with an assiduity worthy of larger coin. At every half-minute or so he placed his money on a certain spot, and as regularly had the mortification of seeing it swept away by the croupier’s rake. After a while he varied his procedure. He risked his money, which from the look of his face seemed rather to have dwindled than increased, less recklessly against long odds than before. Leaving off backing numbers *en plein*, he laid his venture *à cheval*; then tried it upon the dozens; then upon two numbers; then upon a square; and, apparently getting nearer and nearer defeat, at last upon the simple chances of even or odd, over or under, red or black. Yet with a few fluctuations in his favour fortune bore steadily against him, till he could breast her blows no longer. He rose from the table and came towards Somerset, and they both moved on together into the entrance-hall.

Dare was at that moment the victim of an overpowering mania for more money. His presence in the South of Europe had its origin, as may be guessed, in Captain De Stancy’s journey in the same direction, whom he had followed, and troubled with persistent request for more funds, carefully keeping out of sight of

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Paula and the rest. His dream of involving Paula in the De Stancy pedigree knew no abatement. But Somerset had lighted upon him at an instant when that idea, though not displaced, was overwhelmed by a rage for play. In hope of being able to continue it by Somerset's aid he was prepared to do almost anything to please the architect.

'You asked me,' said Dare, stroking his impassive brow, 'if I had seen anything of the Powers. I have seen them; and if I can be of any use to you in giving information about them I shall only be too glad.'

'What information can you give?'

'I can tell you where they are gone to.'

'Where?'

'To the Grand Hotel, Genoa. They went on there this afternoon.'

'Whom do you refer to by they?'

'Mrs. Goodman, Mr. Power, Miss Power, Miss De Stancy, and the worthy captain. He leaves them tomorrow: he comes back here for a day on his way to England.'

Somerset was silent. Dare continued: 'Now I have done you a favour, will you do me one in return?'

Somerset looked towards the gaming-rooms, and said dubiously, 'Well?'

'Lend me two hundred francs.'

'Yes,' said Somerset; 'but on one condition: that I don't give them to you till you are inside the hotel you are staying at.'

'That can't be; it's at Nice.'

'Well I am going back to Nice, and I'll lend you the money the instant we get there.'

'But I want it here, now, instantly!' cried Dare; and for the first time there was a wiry unreasonableness in his voice that fortified his companion more firmly than ever in his determination to lend the young man no money whilst he remained inside that building.

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‘You want it to throw it away. I don’t approve of it; so come with me.’

‘But,’ said Dare, ‘I arrived here with a hundred napoleons and more, expressly to work out my theory of chances and recurrences, which is sound; I have studied it hundreds of times by the help of this.’ He partially drew from his pocket the little volume that we have before seen in his hands. ‘If I only persevere in my system, the certainty that I must win is almost mathematical. I have staked and lost two hundred and thirty-three times. Allowing out of that one chance in every thirty-six, which is the average of zero being marked, and two hundred and four times for the backers of the other numbers, I have the mathematical expectation of six times at least, which would nearly recoup me. And shall I, then, sacrifice that vast foundation of waste chances that I have laid down, and paid for, merely for want of a little ready money?’

‘You might persevere for a twelvemonth, and still not get the better of your reverses. Time tells in favour of the bank. Just imagine for the sake of argument that all the people who have ever placed a stake upon a certain number to be one person playing continuously. Has that imaginary person won? The existence of the bank is a sufficient answer.’

‘But a particular player has the option of leaving off at any point favourable to himself, which the bank has not; and there’s my opportunity.’

‘Which from your mood you will be sure not to take advantage of.’

‘I shall go on playing,’ said Dare doggedly.

‘Not with my money.’

‘Very well; we won’t part as enemies,’ replied Dare, with the flawless politeness of a man whose speech has no longer any kinship with his feelings. ‘Shall we share a bottle of wine? You will not? Well, I hope your luck with your lady will be more magnificent than

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mine has been here; but—mind Captain De Stancy! he's a fearful wildfowl for you.'

'He's a harmless, inoffensive soldier, as far as I know. If he is not—let him be what he may for me.'

'And do his worst to cut you out, I suppose?'

'Ay—if you will.' Somerset, much against his judgment, was being stimulated by these pricks into words of irritation. 'Captain De Stancy might, I think, be better employed than in dangling at the heels of a lady who can well dispense with his company. And you might be better employed than in wasting your wages here.'

'Wages—a fit word for my money. May I ask you at what stage in the appearance of a man whose way of existence is unknown, his money ceases to be called wages and begins to be called means?'

Somerset turned and left him without replying, Dare following his receding figure with a look of ripe resentment, not less likely to vent itself in mischief from the want of moral ballast in him who emitted it. He then fixed a nettled and unsatisfied gaze upon the gaming-rooms, and in another minute or two left the Casino also.

Dare and Somerset met no more that day. The latter returned to Nice by the evening train and went straight to the hotel. He now thanked his fortune that he had not precipitately given up his room there, for a telegram from Paula awaited him. His hand almost trembled as he opened it, to read the following few short words, dated from the Grand Hotel, Genoa:—

'Letter received. Am glad to hear of your journey. We are not returning to Nice, but stay here a week. I direct this at a venture.'

This tantalizing message—the first breaking of her recent silence—was saucy, almost cruel, in its dry frigidity. It led him to give up his idea of following

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at once to Genoa. That was what she obviously expected him to do, and it was possible that his non-arrival might draw a letter or message from her of a sweeter composition than this. That would at least be the effect of his tardiness if she cared in the least for him; if she did not he could bear the worst. The argument was good enough as far as it went, but, like many more, failed from the narrowness of its premises, the contingent intervention of Dare being entirely undreamt of. It was altogether a fatal miscalculation, which cost him dear.

Passing by the telegraph-office in the Rue Pont-Neuf at an early hour the next morning he saw Dare coming out from the door. It was Somerset's momentary impulse to thank Dare for the information given as to Paula's whereabouts, information which had now proved true. But Dare did not seem to appreciate his friendliness, and after a few words of studied civility the young man moved on.

And well he might. Five minutes before that time he had thrown open a gulf of treachery between himself and the architect which nothing in life could ever close. Before leaving the telegraph-office Dare had despatched the following message to Paula direct, as a set-off against what he called Somerset's ingratitude for valuable information, though it was really the fruit of many passions, motives, and desires:—

‘G. Somerset, Nice, to Miss Power, Grand Hotel, Genoa.

‘Have lost all at Monte Carlo. Have learnt that Captain D. S. returns here to-morrow. Please send me one hundred pounds by him, and save me from disgrace. Will await him at eleven o'clock and four, on the Pont-Neuf.’

V

FIVE hours after the despatch of that telegram Captain De Stancy was rattling along the coast railway of the Riviera from Genoa to Nice. He was returning to England by way of Marseilles ; but before turning northwards he had engaged to perform on Miss Power's account a peculiar and somewhat disagreeable duty. This was to place in Somerset's hands a hundred and twenty-five napoleons which had been demanded from her by a message in Somerset's name. The money was in his pocket—all in gold, in a canvas bag, tied up by Paula's own hands, which he had observed to tremble as she tied it.

As he leaned in the corner of the carriage he was thinking over the events of the morning which had culminated in that liberal response. At ten o'clock, before he had gone out from the hotel where he had taken up his quarters, which was not the same as the one patronized by Paula and her friends, he had been summoned to her presence in a manner so unexpected as to imply that something serious was in question. On entering her room he had been struck by the absence of that saucy independence usually apparent in her bearing towards him, notwithstanding the persistency with which he had hovered near her for the previous month, and gradually, by the position of his

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sister, and the favour of Paula's uncle in intercepting one of Somerset's letters and several of his telegrams, established himself as an intimate member of the travelling party. His entry, however, this time as always, had had the effect of a tonic, and it was quite with her customary self-possession that she had told him of the object of her message.

'You think of returning to Nice this afternoon?' she inquired.

De Stancy informed her that such was his intention, and asked if he could do anything for her there.

Then, he remembered, she had hesitated. 'I have received a telegram,' she said at length; and so she allowed to escape her bit by bit the information that her architect, whose name she seemed reluctant to utter, had travelled from England to Nice that week, partly to consult her, partly for a holiday trip; that he had gone on to Monte Carlo, had there lost his money and got into difficulties, and had appealed to her to help him out of them by the immediate advance of some ready cash. It was a sad case, an unexpected case, she murmured, with her eyes fixed on the window. Indeed she could not comprehend it.

To De Stancy there appeared nothing so very extraordinary in Somerset's apparent fiasco, except in so far as that he should have applied to Paula for relief from his distresses instead of elsewhere. It was a self-humiliation which a lover would have avoided at all costs, he thought. Yet after a momentary reflection on his theory of Somerset's character, it seemed sufficiently natural that he should lean persistently on Paula, if only with a view of keeping himself linked to her memory, without thinking too profoundly of his own dignity. That the esteem in which she had held Somerset up to that hour suffered a tremendous blow by his apparent scrape was clearly visible in her, reticent as she was; and De Stancy, while pitying

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Somerset, thanked him in his mind for having gratuitously given a rival an advantage which that rival's attentions had never been able to gain of themselves.

After a little further conversation she had said: 'Since you are to be my messenger, I must tell you that I have decided to send the hundred pounds asked for, and you will please to deliver them into no hands but his own.' A curious little blush crept over her sobered face—perhaps it was a blush of shame at the conduct of the young man in whom she had of late been suspiciously interested—as she added, 'He will be on the Pont-Neuf at four this afternoon and again at eleven to-morrow. Can you meet him there?'

'Certainly,' De Stancy replied.

She then asked him, rather anxiously, how he could account for Mr. Somerset knowing that he, Captain De Stancy, was about to return to Nice?

De Stancy informed her that he left word at the hotel of his intention to return, which was quite true; moreover, there did not lurk in his mind at the moment of speaking the faintest suspicion that Somerset had seen Dare.

She then tied the bag and handed it to him, leaving him with a serene and impenetrable bearing, which he hoped for his own sake meant an acquired indifference to Somerset and his fortunes. Her sending the architect a sum of money which she could easily spare might be set down to natural generosity towards a man with whom she was artistically co-operating for the improvement of her home.

She came back to him again for a moment. 'Could you possibly get there before four this afternoon?' she asked, and he informed her that he could just do so by leaving almost at once, which he was very willing to do, though by so forestalling his time he would lose the projected morning with her and the rest at the Palazzo Doria.

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‘I may tell you that I shall not go to the Palazzo Doria either, if it is any consolation to you to know it,’ was her reply. ‘I shall sit indoors and think of you on your journey.’

The answer admitted of two translations, and conjectures thereon filled the gallant soldier’s mind during the greater part of the journey. He arrived at the hotel they had all stayed at in succession about six hours after Somerset had left it for a little excursion to San Remo and its neighbourhood, as a means of passing a few days till Paula should write again to inquire why he had not come on. De Stancy saw no one he knew, and in obedience to Paula’s commands he promptly set off on foot for the Pont-Neuf.

Though opposed to the architect as a lover, De Stancy felt for him as a poor devil in need of money, having had experiences of that sort himself, and he was really anxious that the needful supply entrusted to him should reach Somerset’s hands. He was on the bridge five minutes before the hour, and when the clock struck a hand was laid on his shoulder: turning he beheld Dare.

Knowing that the youth was loitering somewhere along the coast, for they had frequently met together on De Stancy’s previous visit, the latter merely said, ‘Don’t bother me for the present, Willy, I have an engagement. You can see me at the hotel this evening.’

‘When you have given me the hundred pounds I will fly like a rocket, captain,’ said the young gentleman. ‘I keep the appointment instead of the other man.’

De Stancy looked hard at him. ‘How—do you know about this?’ he asked breathlessly.

‘I have seen him.’

De Stancy took the young man by the two shoulders and gazed into his eyes. The scrutiny seemed not altogether to remove the suspicion which had suddenly started up in his mind. ‘My soul,’ he said, dropping his arms, ‘can this be true?’

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‘What?’

‘You know.’

Dare shrugged his shoulders; ‘Are you going to hand over the money or no?’ he said.

‘I am going to make inquiries,’ said De Stancy, walking away with a vehement tread.

‘Captain, you are without natural affection,’ said Dare, walking by his side, in a tone which showed his fear that he had over-estimated that emotion. ‘See what I have done for you. You have been my constant care and anxiety for I can’t tell how long. I have stayed awake at night thinking how I might best give you a good start in the world by arranging this judicious marriage, when you have been sleeping as sound as a top with no cares upon your mind at all, and now I have got into a scrape—as the most thoughtful of us may sometimes—you go to make inquiries.’

‘I have promised the lady to whom this money belongs—whose generosity has been shamefully abused in some way—that I will deliver it into no hands but those of one man, and he has not yet appeared. I therefore go to find him.’

Dare laid his hand upon De Stancy’s arm. ‘Captain, we are both warm, and punctilious on points of honour; this will come to a split between us if we don’t mind. So, not to bring matters to a crisis, lend me ten pounds here to enable me to get home, and I’ll disappear.’

In a state bordering on distraction, eager to get the young man out of his sight before worse revelations should rise up between them, De Stancy without pausing in his walk gave him the sum demanded. He soon reached the post-office, where he inquired if a Mr. Somerset had left any directions for forwarding letters.

It was just what Somerset had done. De Stancy was told that Mr. Somerset had commanded that any letters should be sent on to him at the Hôtel Victoria, San Remo.

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It was now evident that the scheme of getting money from Paula was either of Dare's invention, or that Somerset, ashamed of his first impulse, had abandoned it as speedily as it had been formed. De Stancy turned and went out. Dare, in keeping with his promise, had vanished. Captain De Stancy resolved to do nothing in the case till further events should enlighten him, beyond sending a line to Miss Power to inform her that Somerset had not appeared, and that he therefore retained the money for further instructions.

BOOK THE FIFTH

DE STANCY AND PAULA

BOOK THE FIFTH

DE STANCY AND PAULA

I

MISS POWER was reclining on a red velvet couch in the bedroom of an old-fashioned red hotel at Strassburg, and her friend Miss De Stancy was sitting by a window of the same apartment. They were both rather wearied by a long journey of the previous day. The hotel overlooked the large open Kleber Platz, erect in the midst of which the bronze statue of General Kleber received the rays of a warm sun that was powerless to brighten him. The whole square, with its people and vehicles going to and fro as if they had plenty of time, was visible to Charlotte in her chair; but Paula from her horizontal position could see nothing below the level of the many dormered house-tops on the opposite side of the Platz. After watching this upper storey of the city for some time in silence, she asked Charlotte to hand her a binocular lying on the table, through which instrument she quietly regarded the distant roofs.

‘What strange and philosophical creatures storks are,’ she said. ‘They give a taciturn, ghostly character to the whole town.’

The birds were crossing and recrossing the field of the glass in their flight hither and thither between

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the Strassburg chimneys, their sad grey forms sharply outlined against the sky, and their skinny legs showing beneath like the limbs of dead martyrs in Crivelli's emaciated imaginings. The indifference of these birds to all that was going on beneath them impressed her : to harmonize with their solemn and silent movements the houses beneath should have been deserted, and grass growing in the streets.

Behind the long roofs thus visible to Paula over the window-sill, with their tiers of dormer-windows, rose the cathedral spire in airy openwork, forming the highest object in the scene ; it suggested something which for a long time she appeared unwilling to utter ; but natural instinct had its way.

'A place like this,' she said, 'where he can study Gothic architecture, would, I should have thought, be a spot more congenial to him than Monaco.'

The person referred to was the misrepresented Somerset, whom the two had been gingerly discussing from time to time, allowing any casual subject, such as that of the storks, to interrupt the personal one at every two or three sentences.

'It would be more like him to be here,' replied Miss De Stancy, trusting her tongue with only the barest generalities on this matter.

Somerset was again dismissed for the stork topic, but Paula could not let him alone ; and she presently resumed, as if an irresistible fascination compelled what judgment had forbidden : 'The strongest-minded persons are sometimes caught unawares at that place, if they once think they will retrieve their first losses ; and I am not aware that he is particularly strong-minded.'

For a moment Charlotte looked at her with a mixed expression, in which there was deprecation that a woman with any feeling should criticize Somerset so frigidly, and relief that it was Paula who did so. For, notwithstanding her assumption that Somerset could never be

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anything more to her than he was already, Charlotte's heart would occasionally step down and trouble her views so expressed.

Whether looking through a glass at distant objects enabled Paula to bottle up her affection for the absent one, or whether her friend Charlotte had so little personality in Paula's regard that she could commune with her as with a lay figure, it was certain that she evinced remarkable ease in speaking of Somerset, resuming her words about him in the tone of one to whom he was at most an ordinary professional adviser. 'It would be very awkward for the works at the castle if he has got into a scrape. I suppose the builders were well posted up with instructions before he left: but he ought certainly to return soon. Why did he leave England at all just now?'

'Perhaps it was to see you.'

'He should have waited; it would not have been so dreadfully long to May or June. Charlotte, how can a man who does such a hare-brained thing as this be deemed trustworthy in an important work like that of rebuilding Stancy Castle?'

There was such stress in the inquiry that, whatever factitiousness had gone before, Charlotte perceived Paula to be at last speaking her mind; and it seemed as if Somerset must have considerably lost ground in her opinion, or she would not have criticized him thus.

'My brother will tell us full particulars when he comes: perhaps it is not at all as we suppose,' said Charlotte. She strained her eyes across the Platz and added, 'He ought to have been here before this time.'

While they waited and talked, Paula still observing the storks, the hotel omnibus came round the corner from the station. 'I believe he has arrived,' resumed Miss De Stancy; 'I see something that looks like his portmanteau on the top of the omnibus. . . . Yes; it is his baggage. I'll run down to him.'

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De Stancy had obtained six weeks' additional leave on account of his health, which had somewhat suffered in India. The first use he made of his extra time was in hastening back to meet the travelling ladies here at Strassburg. Mr. Power and Mrs. Goodman were also at the hotel, and when Charlotte got downstairs, the former was welcoming De Stancy at the door.

Paula had not seen him since he set out from Genoa for Nice, commissioned by her to deliver the hundred pounds to Somerset. His note, stating that he had failed to meet Somerset, contained no details, and she guessed that he would soon appear before her now to answer any question about that peculiar errand.

Her anticipations were justified by the event; she had no sooner gone into the next sitting-room than Charlotte De Stancy appeared and asked if her brother might come up. The closest observer would have been in doubt whether Paula's ready reply in the affirmative was prompted by personal consideration for De Stancy, or by a hope to hear more of his mission to Nice. As soon as she had welcomed him she reverted at once to the subject.

'Yes, as I told you, he was not at the place of meeting,' De Stancy replied. And taking from his pocket the bag of ready money he placed it intact upon the table.

De Stancy did this with a hand that shook somewhat more than a long railway journey was adequate to account for; and in truth it was the vision of Dare's position which agitated the unhappy captain: for had that young man, as De Stancy feared, been tampering with Somerset's name, his fate now trembled in the balance; Paula would unquestionably and naturally invoke the aid of the law against him if she discovered such an imposition.

'Were you punctual to the time mentioned?' she asked curiously.

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De Stancy replied in the affirmative.

‘Did you wait long?’ she continued.

‘Not very long,’ he answered, his instinct to screen the possibly guilty one confining him to guarded statements, while still adhering to the literal truth.

‘Why was that?’

‘Somebody came and told me that he would not appear.’

‘Who?’

‘A young man who has been acting as his clerk. His name is Dare. He informed me that Mr. Somerset could not keep the appointment.’

‘Why?’

‘He had gone on to San Remo.’

‘Has he been travelling with Mr. Somerset?’

‘He had been with him. They know each other very well. But as you commissioned me to deliver the money into no hands but Mr. Somerset’s, I adhered strictly to your instructions.’

‘But perhaps my instructions were not wise. Should it in your opinion have been sent by this young man? Was he commissioned to ask you for it?’

De Stancy murmured that Dare was not commissioned to ask for it; that upon the whole he deemed her instructions wise; and was still of opinion that the best thing had been done.

Although De Stancy was distracted between his desire to preserve Dare from the consequences of folly, and a gentlemanly wish to keep as close to the truth as was compatible with that condition, his answers had not appeared to Paula to be particularly evasive, the conjuncture being one in which a handsome heiress’s shrewdness was prone to overleap itself by setting down embarrassment on the part of the man she questioned to a mere lover’s difficulty in steering between honour and rivalry.

She put but one other question. ‘Did it appear as

if he, Mr. Somerset, after telegraphing, had—had—regretted doing so, and evaded the result by not keeping the appointment?’

‘That’s just how it appears.’ The words, which saved Dare from ignominy, cost De Stancy a good deal. He was sorry for Somerset, sorry for himself, and very sorry for Paula. But Dare was to De Stancy what Somerset could never be: and ‘for his kin that is near unto him shall a man be defiled.’

After that interview Charlotte saw with warring impulses that Somerset slowly diminished in Paula’s estimate; slowly as the moon wanes, but as certainly. Charlotte’s own love was of a clinging, uncritical sort, and though the shadowy intelligence of Somerset’s doings weighed down her soul with regret, it seemed to make not the least difference in her affection for him.

In the afternoon the whole party, including De Stancy, drove about the streets. Here they looked at the house in which Goethe had lived, and afterwards entered the cathedral. Observing in the south transept a crowd of people waiting patiently, they were reminded that they unwittingly stood in the presence of the popular clock-work of Schwilgué.

Mr. Power and Mrs. Goodman decided that they would wait with the rest of the idlers and see the puppets perform at the striking. Charlotte also waited with them; but as it wanted eight minutes to the hour, and as Paula had seen the show before, she moved on into the nave.

Presently she found that De Stancy had followed. He did not come close till she, seeing him stand silent, said, ‘If it were not for this cathedral, I should not like the city at all; and I have even seen cathedrals I like better. Luckily we are going on to Baden to-morrow.’

‘Your uncle has just told me. He has asked me to keep you company.’

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‘Are you intending to?’ said Paula, probing the base-moulding of a pier with her parasol.

‘I have nothing better to do, nor indeed half so good,’ said De Stancy. ‘I am abroad for my health, you know, and what’s like the Rhine and its neighbourhood in early summer, before the crowd comes? It is delightful to wander about there, or anywhere, like a child, influenced by no fixed motive more than that of keeping near some friend, or friends, including the one we most admire in the world.’

‘That sounds perilously like love-making.’

‘’Tis love indeed.’

‘Well, love is natural to men, I suppose,’ rejoined the young lady. ‘But you must love within bounds; or you will be enervated, and cease to be useful as a heavy arm of the service.’

‘My dear Miss Power, your didactic and respectable rules won’t do for me. If you expect straws to stop currents, you are sadly mistaken! But no—let matters be: I am a happy contented mortal at present, say what you will. . . . You don’t ask why? Perhaps you know. It is because all I care for in the world is near me, and that I shall never be more than a hundred yards from her as long as the present arrangement continues.’

‘We are in a cathedral, remember, Captain De Stancy, and should not keep up a secular conversation.’

‘If I had never said worse in a cathedral than what I have said here, I should be content to meet my eternal Judge without absolution. Your uncle asked me this morning how I liked you.’

‘Well, there was no harm in that.’

‘How I like you! Harm, no; but you should have seen how silly I looked. Fancy the inadequacy of the expression when my whole sense is absorbed by you.’

‘Men allow themselves to be made ridiculous by their own feelings in an inconceivable way.’

‘True, I am a fool; but forgive me,’ he rejoined,

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observing her gaze, which wandered critically from roof to clerestory, and then to the pillars, without once lighting on him. 'Don't mind saying Yes. — You look at this thing and that thing, but you never look at me, though I stand here and see nothing but you.'

'There, the clock is striking—and the cock crows. Please go across to the transept and tell them to come out this way.'

De Stancy went. When he had gone a few steps he turned his head. She had at last ceased to study the architecture, and was looking at him. Perhaps his words had struck her, for it seemed at that moment as if he read in her bright eyes a genuine interest in him and his fortunes.

II

NEXT day they went on to Baden. De Stancy was beginning to cultivate the passion of love even more as an escape from the gloomy relations of his life than as matrimonial strategy. Paula's juxtaposition had the attribute of making him forget everything in his own history. She was a magic alternative; and the most foolish boyish shape into which he could throw his feelings for her was in this respect to be aimed at as the act of highest wisdom.

He supplemented the natural warmth of feeling that she had wrought in him by every artificial means in his power, to make the distraction the more complete. He had not known anything like this self-obscuration for a dozen years, and when he conjectured that she might really learn to love him he felt exalted in his own eyes and purified from the dross of his former life. Such uneasiness of conscience as arose when he suddenly remembered Dare, and the possibility that Somerset was getting ousted unfairly, had its weight in depressing him; but he was inclined to accept his fortune without much question.

The journey to Baden, though short, was not without incidents on which he could work out this curious hobby of cultivating to superlative power an already positive passion. Handing her in and out of the

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carriage, accidentally getting brushed by her clothes ; of all such as this he made available fuel. Paula, though she might have guessed the general nature of what was going on, seemed unconscious of the refinements he was trying to throw into it, and sometimes, when in stepping into or from a railway carriage she unavoidably put her hand upon his arm, the obvious insignificance she attached to the action struck him with misgiving.

One of the first things they did at Baden was to stroll into the Trink-halle, where Paula sipped the water. She was about to put down the glass, when De Stancy quickly took it from her hands as though to make use of it himself.

‘O, if that is what you mean,’ she said mischievously, ‘you should have noticed the exact spot. It was there.’ She put her finger on a particular portion of its edge.

‘You ought not to act like that, unless you mean something, Miss Power,’ he replied gravely.

‘Tell me more plainly.’

‘I mean, you should not do things which excite in me the hope that you care something for me, unless you really do.’

‘I put my finger on the edge and said it was there.’

‘Meaning, “It was there my lips touched ; let yours do the same.”’

‘The latter part I wholly deny,’ she answered, with disregard, after which she went away, and kept between Charlotte and her aunt for the rest of the afternoon.

Since the receipt of the telegram Paula had been frequently silent ; she frequently stayed in alone, and sometimes she became quite gloomy—an altogether unprecedented phase for her. This was the case on the morning after the incident in the Trink-halle. Not

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to intrude on her, Charlotte walked about the landings of the sunny white hotel in which they had taken up their quarters, went down into the court, and petted the tortoises that were creeping about there among the flowers and plants; till at last, on going to her friend, she caught her reading some old letters of Somerset's.

Paula made no secret of them, and Miss De Stancy could see that more than half were written on blue paper, with diagrams amid the writing: they were, in fact, simply those sheets of his letters which related to the rebuilding. Nevertheless, Charlotte fancied she had caught Paula in a sentimental mood; and doubtless could Somerset have walked in at this moment instead of Charlotte it might have fared well with him, so insidiously do tender memories reassert themselves in the face of outward mishaps.

They took a drive down the Lichtenthal road and then into the forest, De Stancy and Abner Power riding on horseback alongside. The sun streamed yellow behind their backs as they wound up the long inclines, lighting the red trunks, and even the blue-black foliage itself. The summer had already made impression upon that mass of uniform colour by tipping every twig with a tiny sprout of virescent yellow; while the minute sounds which issued from the forest revealed that the apparently still place was becoming a perfect reservoir of insect life.

Abner Power was quite sentimental that day. 'In such places as these,' he said, as he rode alongside Mrs. Goodman, 'nature's powers in the multiplication of one type strike me as much as the grandeur of the mass.'

Mrs. Goodman agreed with him, and Paula said, 'The foliage forms the roof of an interminable green crypt, the pillars being the trunks, and the vault the interlacing boughs.'

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‘It is a fine place in a thunderstorm,’ said De Stancy. ‘I am not an enthusiast, but to see the lightning spring hither and thither, like lazy-tongs, bristling, and striking, and vanishing, is rather impressive.’

‘It must be indeed,’ said Paula.

‘And in the winter winds these pines sigh like ten thousand spirits in trouble.’

‘Indeed they must,’ said Paula.

‘At the same time I know a little fir-plantation about a mile square, not far from Markton,’ said De Stancy, ‘which is precisely like this in miniature,—stems, colours, slopes, winds, and all. If we were to go there any time with a highly magnifying pair of spectacles it would look as fine as this—and save a deal of travelling.’

‘I know the place, and I agree with you,’ said Paula.

‘You agree with me on all subjects but one,’ he presently observed, in a voice not intended to reach the others.

Paula looked at him, but was silent.

Onward and upward they went, the same pattern and colour of tree repeating themselves endlessly, till in a couple of hours they reached the castle hill which was to be the end of their journey, and beheld stretched beneath them the valley of the Murg. They alighted and entered the fortress.

‘What did you mean by that look of kindness you bestowed upon me just now, when I said you agreed with me on all subjects but one?’ asked De Stancy half humorously, as he held open a little door for her, the others having gone ahead.

‘I meant, I suppose, that I was much obliged to you for not requiring agreement on that one subject,’ she said, passing on.

‘Not more than that?’ said De Stancy, as he followed her. ‘But whenever I involuntarily express

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towards you sentiments that there can be no mistaking, you seem truly compassionate.'

'If I seem so, I feel so.'

'If you mean no more than mere compassion, I wish you would show nothing at all, for your mistaken kindness is only preparing more misery for me than I should have if let alone to suffer without mercy.'

'I implore you to be quiet, Captain De Stancy! Leave me, and look out of the window at the view here, or at the pictures, or at the armour, or whatever it is we are come to see.'

'Very well. But pray don't extract amusement from my harmless remarks. Such as they are I mean them.'

She stopped him by changing the subject, for they had entered an octagonal chamber on the first floor, presumably full of pictures and curiosities; but the shutters were closed, and only stray beams of light gleamed in to suggest what was there.

'Can't somebody open the windows?' said Paula.

'The attendant is about to do it,' said her uncle; and as he spoke the shutters to the east were flung back, and one of the loveliest views in the forest disclosed itself outside.

Some of them stepped out upon the balcony. The river lay along the bottom of the valley, irradiated with a silver shine. Little rafts of pinewood floated on its surface like tiny splinters, the men who steered them not appearing larger than ants.

Paula stood on the balcony, looking for a few minutes upon the sight, and then came into the shadowy room, where De Stancy had remained. While the rest were still outside she resumed: 'You must not suppose that I shrink from the subject you so persistently bring before me. I respect deep affection—you know I do; but for me to say that I have any such for you, of the particular sort you only will be

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satisfied with, would be absurd. I don't feel it, and therefore there can be nothing between us. One would think it would be better to feel kindly towards you than to feel nothing at all. But if you object to that I'll try to feel nothing.'

'I don't really object to your sympathy,' said De Stancy, rather struck by her seriousness. 'But it is very saddening to think you can feel nothing more.'

'It must be so, since I *can* feel no more,' she decisively replied, adding, as she stopped her seriousness: 'You must pray for strength to get over it.'

'One thing I shall never pray for; to see you give yourself to another man. But I suppose I shall witness that some day.'

'You may,' she gravely returned.

'You have no doubt chosen him already,' cried the captain bitterly.

'No, Captain De Stancy,' she said shortly, a faint involuntary blush coming into her face as she guessed his allusion.

This, and a few glances round at the pictures and curiosities, completed their survey of the castle. De Stancy knew better than to trouble her further that day with special remarks. During the return journey he rode ahead with Mr. Power and she saw no more of him.

She would have been astonished had she heard the conversation of the two gentlemen as they wound gently downwards through the trees.

'As far as I am concerned,' Captain De Stancy's companion was saying, 'nothing would give me more unfeigned delight than that you should persevere and win her. But you must understand that I have no authority over her—nothing more than the natural influence that arises from my being her father's brother.'

'And for exercising that much, whatever it may be, in my favour I thank you heartily,' said De Stancy.

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‘But I am coming to the conclusion that it is useless to press her further. She is right! I am not the man for her. I am too old, and too poor; and I must put up as well as I can with her loss—drown her image in old Falernian till I embark in Charon’s boat for good!—Really, if I had the industry I could write some good Horatian verses on my inauspicious situation! . . . Ah, well;—in this way I affect levity over my troubles; but in plain truth my life will not be the brightest without her.’

‘Don’t be down-hearted! you are too—too gentlemanly, De Stancy, in this matter—you are too soon put off—you should have a touch of the canvasser about you in approaching her; and not stick at things. You have my hearty invitation to travel with us all the way till we cross to England, and there will be heaps of opportunities as we wander on. I’ll keep a slow pace to give you time.’

‘You are very good, my friend! Well, I will try again. I am full of doubt and indecision, mind, but at present I feel that I will try again. There is, I suppose, a slight possibility of something or other turning up in my favour, if it is true that the unexpected always happens—for I foresee no chance whatever. . . . Which way do we go when we leave here to-morrow?’

‘To Carlsruhe, she says, if the rest of us have no objection.’

‘Carlsruhe, then, let it be, with all my heart; or anywhere.’

To Carlsruhe they went next day, after a night of soft rain which brought up a warm steam from the Schwarzwald valleys, and caused the young tufts and grasses to swell visibly in a few hours. After the Baden slopes the flat thoroughfares of ‘Charles’s Rest’ seemed somewhat uninteresting, though a busy fair which was proceeding in the streets created a quaint and

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unexpected liveliness. On reaching the old-fashioned inn in the Lange-Strasse that they had fixed on, the women of the party betook themselves to their rooms, and showed little inclination to see more of the world that day than could be gleaned from the hotel windows.

III

WHILE the malignant tongues had been playing havoc with Somerset's fame in the ears of Paula and her companion, the young man himself was proceeding partly by rail, partly on foot, below and amid the olive-clad hills, vineyards, carob groves, and lemon gardens of the Mediterranean shores. Arrived at San Remo he wrote to Nice to inquire for letters, and such as had come were duly forwarded; but not one of them was from Paula. This broke down his resolution to hold off, and he hastened directly to Genoa, regretting that he had not taken this step when he first heard that she was there.

Something in the very aspect of the marble halls of that city, which at any other time he would have liked to linger over, whispered to him that the bird had flown; and inquiry confirmed the fancy. Nevertheless, the architectural beauties of the palace-bordered street, looking as if mountains of marble must have been levelled to supply the materials for constructing it, detained him there two days: or rather a feat of resolution, by which he set himself to withstand the drag-chain of Paula's influence, was operative for that space of time.

At the end of it he moved onward. There was no difficulty in discovering their track northwards; and

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feeling that he might as well return to England by the Rhine route as by any other, he followed in the course they had chosen, getting scent of them in Strassburg, missing them at Baden by a day, and finally overtaking them at Carlsruhe, which town he reached on the morning after the Power and De Stancy party had taken up their quarters at the ancient inn above mentioned.

When Somerset was about to get out of the train at this place, little dreaming what a meaning the word Carlsruhe would have for him in subsequent years, he was disagreeably surprised to see no other than Dare stepping out of the adjoining carriage. A new brown leather valise in one of his hands, a new umbrella in the other, and a new suit of fashionable clothes on his back, seemed to denote considerable improvement in the young man's fortunes. Somerset was so struck by the circumstance of his being on this spot that he almost missed his opportunity for alighting.

Dare meanwhile had moved on without seeing his former employer, and Somerset resolved to take the chance that offered, and let him go. There was something so mysterious in their common presence simultaneously at one place, five hundred miles from where they had last met, that he exhausted conjecture on whether Dare's errand this way could have anything to do with his own, or whether their juxtaposition a second time was the result of pure accident. Greatly as he would have liked to get this answered by a direct question to Dare himself, he did not counteract his first instinct, and remained unseen.

They went out in different directions, when Somerset for the first time remembered that, in learning at Baden that the party had flitted towards Carlsruhe, he had taken no care to ascertain the name of the hotel they were bound for. Carlsruhe was not a large place and the point was immaterial, but the omission would necessitate a little inquiry. To follow Dare on the chance

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of his having fixed upon the same quarters was a course which did not commend itself. He resolved to get some lunch before proceeding with his business—or fatuity—of discovering the elusive lady, and drove off to a neighbouring tavern, which did not happen to be, as he hoped it might, the one chosen by those who had preceded him.

Meanwhile Dare, previously master of their plans, went straight to the house which sheltered them, and on entering under the archway from the Lange-Strasse was saved the trouble of inquiring for Captain De Stancy by seeing him drinking bitters at a little table in the court. Had Somerset chosen this inn for his quarters instead of the one in the Market-Place which he actually did choose, the three must inevitably have met here at this moment, with some possibly striking dramatic results; though what they would have been remains for ever hidden in the darkness of the unfulfilled.

De Stancy jumped up from his chair, and went forward to the new-comer. 'You are not long behind us, then,' he said, with laconic disquietude. 'I thought you were going straight home?'

'I was,' said Dare, 'but I have been blessed with what I may call a small competency since I saw you last. Of the two hundred francs you gave me I risked fifty at the tables, and I have multiplied them, how many times do you think? More than four hundred times.'

De Stancy immediately looked grave. 'I wish you had lost them,' he said, with as much feeling as could be shown in a place where strangers were hovering near.

'Nonsense, captain! I have proceeded purely on a calculation of chances; and my calculations proved as true as I expected, notwithstanding a little in-and-out luck at first. Witness this as the result.' He smacked his bag with his umbrella, and the chink of money resounded from within. 'Just feel the weight of it!'

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‘It is not necessary. I’ll take your word.’

‘Shall I lend you five pounds?’

‘God forbid! As if that would repay me for what you have cost me! But come, let’s get out of this place to where we can talk more freely.’ He put his hand through the young man’s arm, and led him round the corner of the hotel towards the Schloss-Platz.

‘These runs of luck will be your ruin, as I have told you before,’ continued Captain De Stancy. ‘You will be for repeating and repeating your experiments, and will end by blowing your brains out, as wiser heads than yours have done. I am glad you have come away, at any rate. Why did you travel this way?’

‘Simply because I could afford it, of course.—But come, captain, something has ruffled you to-day. I thought you did not look in the best temper the moment I saw you. Every sip you took of your pick-up as you sat there showed me something was wrong. Tell your worry!’

‘Pooh—I can tell you in two words,’ said the captain satirically. ‘Your arrangement for my wealth and happiness—for I suppose you still claim it to be yours—has fallen through. The lady has announced to-day that she means to send for Somerset instantly. She is coming to a personal explanation with him. So woe to me—and in another sense, woe to you, as I have reason to fear.’

‘Send for him!’ said Dare, with the stillness of complete abstraction. ‘Then he’ll come.’

‘Well,’ said De Stancy, looking him in the face. ‘And does it make you feel you had better be off? How about that telegram? Did he ask you to send it, or did he not?’

‘One minute, or I shall be up such a tree as nobody ever saw the like of.’

‘Then what did you come here for?’ burst out De Stancy. ‘’Tis my belief you are no more than a——

But I won't call you names; I'll tell you quite plainly that if there is anything wrong in that message to her—which I believe there is—no, I can't believe, though I fear it—you have the chance of appearing in drab clothes at the expense of the Government before the year is out, and I of being eternally disgraced!’

‘No, captain, you won't be disgraced. I am bad to beat, I can tell you. And come the worst luck, I don't say a word.’

‘But those letters pricked in your skin would say a good deal, it strikes me.’

‘What! would they strip me?—but it is not coming to that. Look here, now, I'll tell you the truth for once; though you don't believe me capable of it. I *did* concoct that telegram—and sent it; just as a practical joke; and many a worse one has been only laughed at by honest men and officers. I could show you a bigger joke still—a joke of jokes—on the same individual.’

Dare as he spoke put his hand into his breast-pocket, as if the said joke lay there; but after a moment he withdrew his hand empty, as he continued:

‘Having invented it I have done enough; I was going to explain it to you, that you might carry it out. But you are so serious, that I will leave it alone. My second joke shall die with me.’

‘So much the better,’ said De Stancy. ‘I don't like your jokes, even though they are not directed against myself. They express a kind of humour which does not suit me.’

‘You may have reason to alter your mind,’ said Dare carelessly. ‘Your success with your lady may depend on it. The truth is, captain, we aristocrats must not take too high a tone. Our days as an independent division of society, which holds aloof from other sections, are past. This has been my argument (in spite of my strong Norman feelings) ever since I

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broached the subject of your marrying this girl, who represents both intellect and wealth—all, in fact, except the historical prestige that you represent. And we mustn't flinch at things. The case is even more pressing than ordinary cases—owing to the odd fact that the representative of the new blood who has come in our way actually lives in your own old house, and owns your own old lands. The ordinary reason for such alliances is quintupled in our case. Do then just think and be reasonable, before you talk tall about not liking my jokes, and all that. Beggars mustn't be choosers.'

'There's really much reason in your argument,' said De Stancy, with a bitter laugh: 'and my own heart argues much the same way. But, leaving me to take care of my aristocratic self, I advise your aristocratic self to slip off at once to England like any hang-gallows dog; and if Somerset is here, and you have been doing wrong in his name, and it all comes out, I'll try to save you, as far as an honest man can. If you have done no wrong, of course there is no fear; though I should be obliged by your going homeward as quickly as possible, as being better both for you and for me, . . . Hullo—Damnation!'

They had reached one side of the Schloss-Platz, nobody apparently being near them save a sentinel who was on duty before the Palace; but turning as he spoke, De Stancy beheld a group consisting of his sister, Paula, and Mr. Power, strolling across the square towards them.

It was impossible to escape their observation, and putting a bold front upon it, De Stancy advanced with Dare at his side, till in a few moments the two parties met, Paula and Charlotte recognizing Dare at once as the young man who assisted at the castle.

'I have met my young photographer,' said De Stancy cheerily. 'What a small world it is, as everybody truly observes! I am wishing he could take some

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views for us as we go on ; but you have no apparatus with you, I suppose, Mr. Dare ?'

'I have not, sir, I am sorry to say,' replied Dare respectfully.

'You could get some, I suppose?' asked Paula of the interesting young photographer.

Dare declared that it would be not impossible : whereupon De Stancy said that it was only a passing thought of his ; and in a few minutes the two parties again separated, going their several ways.

'That was awkward,' said De Stancy, trembling with excitement. 'I would advise you to keep further off in future.'

Dare said thoughtfully that he would be careful, adding, 'She is a prize for any man, indeed, leaving alone the substantial possessions behind her ! Now was I too enthusiastic ? Was I a fool for urging you on ?'

'Wait till success justifies the undertaking. In case of failure it will have been anything but wise. It is no light matter to have a carefully preserved repose broken in upon for nothing — a repose that could never be restored !'

They walked down the Carl-Friedrichs-Strasse to the Margrave's Pyramid, and back to the hotel, where Dare also decided to take up his stay. De Stancy left him with the book-keeper at the desk, and went upstairs to see if the ladies had returned.

IV

HE found them in their sitting-room with their bonnets on, as if they had just come in. Mr. Power was also present, reading a newspaper, but Mrs. Goodman had gone out to a neighbouring shop, in the windows of which she had seen something which attracted her fancy.

When De Stancy entered, Paula's thoughts seemed to revert to Dare, for almost at once she asked him in what direction the youth was travelling. With some hesitation De Stancy replied that he believed Mr. Dare was returning to England after a spring trip for the improvement of his mind.

'A very praiseworthy thing to do,' said Paula. 'What places has he visited?'

'Those which afford opportunities for the study of the old masters, I believe,' said De Stancy blandly. 'He has also been to Turin, Genoa, Marseilles, and so on.' The captain spoke the more readily to her questioning in that he divined her words to be dictated, not by any suspicions of his relations with Dare, but by her knowledge of Dare as the draughtsman employed by Somerset.

'Has he been to Nice?' she next demanded. 'Did he go there in company with my architect?'

'I think not.'

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‘Has he seen anything of him? My architect Somerset once employed him. They know each other.’

‘I think he saw Somerset for a short time.’

Paula was silent. ‘Do you know where this young man Dare is at the present moment?’ she asked quickly.

De Stancy said that Dare was staying at the same hotel with themselves, and that he believed he was downstairs.

‘I think I can do no better than send for him,’ said she. ‘He may be able to throw some light upon the matter of that telegram.’

She rang and despatched the waiter for the young man in question, De Stancy almost visibly trembling for the result. But he opened the town directory which was lying on a table, and affected to be engrossed in the names.

Before Dare was shown in she said to her uncle, ‘Perhaps you will speak to him for me?’

Mr. Power, looking up from the paper he was reading, assented to her proposition. Dare appeared in the doorway, and the waiter retired. Dare seemed a trifle startled out of his usual coolness, the message having evidently been unexpected, and he came forward somewhat uneasily.

‘Mr. Dare, we are anxious to know something of Miss Power’s architect; and Captain De Stancy tells us you have seen him lately,’ said Mr. Power sonorously over the edge of his newspaper.

Not knowing whether danger menaced or no, or, if it menaced, from what quarter it was to be expected, Dare felt that honesty was as good as anything else for him, and replied boldly that he had seen Mr. Somerset, De Stancy continuing to cream and mantle almost visibly, in anxiety at the situation of the speaker.

‘And where did you see him?’ continued Mr. Power.

‘In the Casino at Monte Carlo.’

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‘How long did you see him?’

‘Only for half an hour. I left him there.’

Paula’s interest got the better of her reserve, and she cut in upon her uncle: ‘Did he seem in any unusual state, or in trouble?’

‘He was rather excited,’ said Dare.

‘And can you remember when that was?’

Dare considered, looked at his pocket-book, and said that it was on the evening of April the twenty-second.

The answer had a significance for Paula, De Stancy, and Charlotte, to which Abner Power was a stranger. The telegraphic request for money, which had been kept a secret from him by his niece, because of his already unfriendly tone towards Somerset, arrived on the morning of the twenty-third—a date which neighboured with painfully suggestive nicety upon that now given by Dare.

She seemed to be silenced, and asked no more questions. Dare having furbished himself up to a gentlemanly appearance with some of his recent winnings, was invited to stay on awhile by Paula’s uncle, who, as became a travelled man, was not fastidious as to company. Being a youth of the world, Dare made himself agreeable to that gentleman, and afterwards tried to do the same with Miss De Stancy. At this the captain, to whom the situation for some time had been amazingly uncomfortable, pleaded some excuse for going out, and left the room.

Dare continued his endeavours to say a few polite nothings to Charlotte De Stancy, in the course of which he drew from his pocket his new silk handkerchief. By some chance a card came out with the handkerchief, and fluttered downwards. His momentary instinct was to make a grasp at the card and conceal it: but it had already tumbled to the floor, where it lay face upward beside Charlotte De Stancy’s chair.

It was neither a visiting nor a playing card, but one bearing a photographic portrait of a peculiar nature. It

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was what Dare had characterized as his best joke of all in speaking on the subject to Captain De Stancy: he had in the morning put it ready in his pocket to give to the captain, and had in fact held it in waiting between his finger and thumb while talking to him in the Platz, meaning that he should make use of it against his rival whenever convenient. But his sharp conversation with that soldier had dulled his zest for this final joke at Somerset's expense, had at least shown him that De Stancy would not adopt the joke by accepting the photograph and using it himself, and determined him to lay it aside till a more convenient time. So fully had he made up his mind on this course, that when the photograph slipped out he did not at first perceive the appositeness of the circumstance, in putting into his own hands the *rôle* he had intended for De Stancy; though it was asserted afterwards that the whole scene was deliberately planned. However, once having seen the accident, he resolved to take the current as it served.

The card having fallen beside her, Miss De Stancy glanced over it, which indeed she could not help doing. The smile that had previously hung upon her lips was arrested as if by frost: and she involuntarily uttered a little distressed cry of 'O!' like one in bodily pain.

Paula, who had been talking to her uncle during this interlude, started round, and wondering what had happened, inquiringly crossed the room to poor Charlotte's side, asking her what was the matter. Charlotte had regained self-possession, though not enough to enable her to reply, and Paula asked her a second time what had made her exclaim like that. Miss De Stancy still seemed confused, whereupon Paula noticed that her eyes were continually drawn as if by fascination towards the photograph on the floor, which, contrary to his first impulse, Dare, as has been said, now seemed in no hurry to regain. Sur-

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missing at last that the card, whatever it was, had something to do with the exclamation, Paula picked it up.

It was a portrait of Somerset ; but by a device known in photography the operator, though contriving to produce what seemed to be a perfect likeness, had given it the distorted features and wild attitude of a man advanced in intoxication. No woman, unless specially cognizant of such possibilities, could have looked upon it and doubted that the photograph was a genuine illustration of a customary phase in the young man's private life.

Paula observed it, thoroughly took it in ; but the effect upon her was by no means clear. Charlotte's eyes at once forsook the portrait to dwell on Paula's face. It paled a little, and this was followed by a hot blush—perceptibly a blush of shame. That was all. She flung the picture down on the table, and moved away.

It was now Mr. Power's turn. Anticipating Dare, who was advancing with a deprecatory look to seize the photograph, he also grasped it. When he saw whom it represented he seemed both amused and startled, and after scanning it a while handed it to the young man with a queer smile.

'I am very sorry,' began Dare in a low voice to Mr. Power. 'I fear I was to blame for thoughtlessness in not destroying it. But I thought it was rather funny that a man should permit such a thing to be done, and that the humour would redeem the offence.'

'In you, for purchasing it,' said Paula with haughty quickness from the other side of the room. 'Though probably his friends, if he has any, would say not in him.'

There was silence in the room after this, and Dare, finding himself rather in the way, took his leave as unostentatiously as a cat that has upset the family china, though he continued to say among his apologies that he was not aware Mr. Somerset was a personal friend of the ladies.

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Of all the thoughts which filled the minds of Paula and Charlotte De Stancy, the thought that the photograph might have been a fabrication was probably the last. To them that picture of Somerset had all the cogency of direct vision. Paula's experience, much less Charlotte's, had never lain in the fields of heliographic science, and they would as soon have thought that the sun could again stand still upon Gibeon, as that it could be made to falsify men's characters in delineating their features. What Abner Power thought he himself best knew. He might have seen such pictures before; or he might never have heard of them.

While pretending to resume his reading he closely observed Paula, as did also Charlotte De Stancy; but thanks to the self-management which was Miss Power's as much by nature as by art, she dissembled whatever emotion was in her.

'It is a pity a professional man should make himself so ludicrous,' she said with such careless intonation that it was almost impossible, even for Charlotte, who knew her so well, to believe her indifference feigned.

'Yes,' said Mr. Power, since Charlotte did not speak: 'it is what I scarcely should have expected.'

'O, I am not surprised!' said Paula quickly. 'You don't know all.' The inference was, indeed, inevitable that if her uncle were made aware of the telegram he would see nothing unlikely in the picture. 'Well, you are very silent!' continued Paula petulantly, when she found that nobody went on talking. 'What made you cry out "O," Charlotte, when Mr. Dare dropped that horrid photograph?'

'I don't know; I suppose it frightened me,' stammered the girl.

'It was a stupid fuss to make before such a person. One would think you were in love with Mr. Somerset.'

'What did you say, Paula?' inquired her uncle,

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looking up from the newspaper which he had again resumed.

‘Nothing, Uncle Abner.’ She walked to the window, and, as if to tide over what was plainly passing in their minds about her, she began to make remarks on objects in the street. ‘What a quaint being—look, Charlotte!’ It was an old woman sitting by a stall on the opposite side of the way, which seemed suddenly to hit Paula’s sense of the humorous, though beyond the fact that the dame was old and poor, and wore a white handkerchief over her head, there was really nothing noteworthy about her.

Paula seemed to be more hurt by what the silence of her companions implied—a suspicion that the discovery of Somerset’s depravity was wounding her heart—than by the wound itself. The ostensible ease with which she drew them into a bye conversation had perhaps the defect of proving too much: though her tacit contention that no love was in question was not incredible on the supposition that affronted pride alone caused her embarrassment. The chief symptom of her heart being really tender towards Somerset consisted in her apparent blindness to Charlotte’s secret, so obviously suggested by her momentary agitation.

V

AND where was the subject of their condemnatory opinions all this while? Having secured a room at his inn, he came forth to complete the discovery of his dear mistress's halting-place without delay. After one or two inquiries he ascertained where such a party of English were staying; and arriving at the hotel, knew at once that he had tracked them to earth by seeing the heavier portion of the Power luggage confronting him in the hall. He sent up intelligence of his presence, and awaited her reply with a beating heart.

In the meanwhile Dare, descending from his pernicious interview with Paula and the rest, had descried Captain De Stancy in the public drawing-room, and entered to him forthwith. It was while they were here together that Somerset passed the door and sent up his name to Paula.

The incident at the railway station was now reversed, Somerset being the observed of Dare, as Dare had then been the observed of Somerset. Immediately on sight of him Dare showed real alarm. He had imagined that Somerset would eventually impinge on Paula's route, but he had scarcely expected it yet; and the architect's sudden appearance led Dare to ask himself the ominous question whether Somerset had discovered his telegraphic trick, and was in the mood for prompt measures.

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‘There is no more for me to do here,’ said the boy-man hastily to De Stancy. ‘Miss Power does not wish to ask me any more questions. I may as well proceed on my way, as you advised.’

De Stancy, who had also gazed with dismay at Somerset’s passing figure, though with dismay of another sort, was recalled from his vexation by Dare’s remarks, and turning upon him he said sharply, ‘Well may you be in such a hurry all of a sudden!’

‘True, I am superfluous now.’

‘You have been doing a foolish thing, and you must suffer its inconveniences.—Will, I am sorry for one thing; I am sorry I ever owned you; for you are not a lad to my heart. You have disappointed me—disappointed me almost beyond endurance.’

‘I have acted according to my illumination. What can you expect of a man born to dishonour?’

‘That’s mere speciousness. Before you knew anything of me, and while you thought you were the child of poverty on both sides, you were well enough; but ever since you thought you were more than that, you have led a life which is intolerable. What has become of your plan of alliance between the De Stancys and the Powers now? The man is gone upstairs who can overthrow it all.’

‘If the man had not gone upstairs, you wouldn’t have complained of my nature or my plans,’ said Dare drily. ‘If I mistake not, he will come down again with the flea in his ear. However, I have done; my play is played out. All the rest remains with you. But, captain, grant me this! If when I am gone this difficulty should vanish, and things should go well with you, and your suit should prosper, will you think of him, bad as he is, who first put you on the track of such happiness, and let him know it was not done in vain?’

‘I will,’ said De Stancy. ‘Promise me that you will be a better boy?’

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‘Very well—as soon as ever I can afford it. Now I am up and away, when I have explained to them that I shall not require my room.’

Dare fetched his bag, touched his hat with his umbrella to the captain, and went out of the hotel archway. De Stancy sat down in the stuffy drawing-room, and wondered what other ironies time had in store for him.

A waiter in the interim had announced Somerset to the group upstairs. Paula started as much as Charlotte at hearing the name, and Abner Power stared at them both.

‘If Mr. Somerset wishes to see me *on business*, show him in,’ said Paula.

In a few seconds the door was thrown open for Somerset. On receipt of the pointed message he guessed that a change had come. Time, absence, ambition, her uncle’s influence, and a new wooer, seemed to account sufficiently well for that change, and he accepted his fate. But a stoical instinct to show her that he could regard vicissitudes with the equanimity that became a man; a desire to ease her mind of any fear she might entertain that his connection with her past would render him troublesome in future, induced him to accept her permission, and see the act to the end.

‘How do you do, Mr. Somerset?’ said Abner Power, with sardonic geniality: he had been far enough about the world not to be greatly concerned at Somerset’s apparent failing, particularly when it helped to reduce him from the rank of lover to his niece to that of professional adviser.

Miss De Stancy faltered a welcome as weak as that of the Maid of Neidpath, and Paula said coldly, ‘We are rather surprised to see you. Perhaps there is something urgent at the castle which makes it necessary for you to call?’

‘There is something a little urgent,’ said Somerset

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slowly, as he approached her; 'and you have judged rightly that it is the cause of my call.' He sat down near her chair as he spoke, put down his hat, and drew a note-book from his pocket with a despairing *sang froid* that was far more perfect than had been Paula's demeanour just before.

'Perhaps you would like to talk over the business with Mr. Somerset alone?' murmured Charlotte to Miss Power, hardly knowing what she said.

'O no,' said Paula, 'I think not. Is it necessary?' she said, turning to him.

'Not in the least,' replied he, bestowing a penetrating glance upon his questioner's face, which seemed however to produce no effect; and turning towards Charlotte, he added, 'You will have the goodness, I am sure, Miss De Stancy, to excuse the jargon of professional details.'

He spread some tracings on the table, and pointed out certain modified features to Paula, commenting as he went on, and exchanging occasionally a few words on the subject with Mr. Abner Power by the distant window.

In this architectural dialogue over his sketches, Somerset's head and Paula's became unavoidably very close. The temptation was too much for the young man. Under cover of the rustle of the tracings, he murmured, 'Paula, I could not get here before!' in a low voice inaudible to the other two.

She did not reply, only busying herself the more with the notes and sketches; and he said again, 'I stayed a couple of days at Genoa, and some days at San Remo, and Mentone.'

'But it is not the least concern of mine where you stayed, is it?' she said, with a cold yet disquieted look.

'Do you speak seriously?' Somerset brokenly whispered.

Paula concluded her examination of the drawings

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and turned from him with sorrowful disregard. He tried no further, but, when she had signified her pleasure on the points submitted, packed up his papers, and rose with the bearing of a man altogether superior to such a class of misfortune as this. Before going he turned to speak a few words of a general kind to Mr. Power and Charlotte.

‘You will stay and dine with us?’ said the former, rather with the air of being unhappily able to do no less than ask the question. ‘My charges here won’t go down to the *table-d’hôte*, I fear, but De Stancy and myself will be there.’

Somerset excused himself, and in a few minutes withdrew. At the door he looked round for an instant, and his eyes met Paula’s. There was the same miles-off expression in hers that they had worn when he entered; but there was also a look of distressful inquiry, as if she were earnestly expecting him to say something more. This of course Somerset did not comprehend. Possibly she was clinging to a hope of some excuse for the message he was supposed to have sent, or for the other and more degrading matter. Anyhow, Somerset only bowed and went away.

A moment after he had gone, Paula, impelled by something or other, crossed the room to the window. In a short time she saw his form in the broad street below, which he traversed obliquely to an opposite corner, his head somewhat bent, and his eyes on the ground. Before vanishing into the Ritterstrasse he turned his head and glanced at the hotel windows, as if he knew that she was watching him. Then he disappeared; and the only real sign of emotion betrayed by Paula during the whole episode escaped her at this moment. It was a slight trembling of the lip and a sigh so slowly breathed that scarce anybody could hear—scarcely even Charlotte, who was reclining on a couch, her face on her hand and her eyes downcast.

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Not more than two minutes had elapsed when Mrs. Goodman came in with a manner of haste.

‘You have returned,’ said Mr. Power. ‘Have you made your purchases?’

Without answering, she asked, ‘Whom, of all people on earth, do you think I have met? Mr. Somerset! Has he been here?—he passed me almost without speaking!’

‘Yes, he has been here,’ said Paula. ‘He is on the way from Genoa home, and called on business.’

‘You will have him here to dinner, of course?’

‘I asked him,’ said Mr. Power, ‘but he declined.’

‘O, that’s unfortunate! Surely we could get him to come. You would like to have him here, would you not, Paula?’

‘No, indeed. I don’t want him here,’ said she.

‘You don’t?’

‘No!’ she said sharply.

‘You used to like him well enough, anyhow,’ bluntly rejoined Mrs. Goodman.

Paula sedately: ‘It is a mistake to suppose that I ever particularly liked the gentleman mentioned.’

‘Then you are wrong, Mrs. Goodman, it seems,’ said Mr. Power.

Mrs. Goodman, who had been growing quietly indignant, notwithstanding a vigorous use of her fan, at this said: ‘Fie, fie, Paula! you did like him. You said to me only a week or two ago that you should not at all object to marry him.’

‘It is a mistake,’ repeated Paula calmly. ‘I meant the other one of the two we were talking about.’

‘What, Captain De Stancy?’

‘Yes.’

Knowing this to be a fiction, Mrs. Goodman made no remark, and hearing a slight noise behind, turned her head. Seeing her aunt’s action, Paula also looked round. The door had been left ajar, and De Stancy

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was standing in the room. The last words of Mrs. Goodman, and Paula's reply, must have been quite audible to him.

They looked at each other much as if they had unexpectedly met at the altar; but after a momentary start Paula did not flinch from the position into which hurt pride had betrayed her. De Stancy bowed gracefully, and she merely walked to the furthest window, whither he followed her.

'I am eternally grateful to you for avowing that I have won favour in your sight at last,' he whispered.

She acknowledged the remark with a somewhat reserved bearing. 'Really I don't deserve your gratitude,' she said. 'I did not know you were there.'

'I know you did not—that's why the avowal is so sweet to me. Can I take you at your word?'

'Yes, I suppose.'

'Then your preference is the greatest honour that has ever fallen to my lot. It is enough: you accept me?'

'As a lover on probation—no more.'

The conversation being carried on in low tones, Paula's uncle and aunt took it as a hint that their presence could be spared, and severally left the room—the former gladly, the latter with some vexation. Charlotte De Stancy followed.

'And to what am I indebted for this happy change?' inquired De Stancy, as soon as they were alone.

'You shouldn't look a gift-horse in the mouth,' she replied brusquely, and with tears in her eyes for one gone.

'You mistake my motive. I am like a reprieved criminal, and can scarcely believe the news.'

'You shouldn't say that to me, or I shall begin to think I have been too kind,' she answered, some of the archness of her manner returning. 'Now, I know what you mean to say in answer; but I don't want to hear

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any more at present ; and whatever you do, don't fall into the mistake of supposing I have accepted you in any other sense than the way I say. If you don't like such a limitation you can go away. I dare say I shall get over it.'

'Go away! Could I go away?—But you are beginning to tease, and will soon punish me severely ; so I will make my escape while all is well. It would be presumptuous to expect more in one day.'

'It would indeed,' said Paula, with her eyes on a bunch of flowers.

VI

ON leaving the hotel, Somerset's first impulse was to get out of sight of its windows, and his glance upward had perhaps not the tender significance that Paula imagined, the last look impelled by any such whiff of emotion having been the lingering one he bestowed upon her in passing out of the room. Unluckily for the prospects of this attachment, Paula's conduct towards him now, as a result of misrepresentation, had enough in common with her previous silence at Nice to make it not unreasonable as a further development of that silence. Moreover, her social position as a woman of wealth, always felt by Somerset as a perceptible bar to that full and free eagerness with which he would fain have approached her, rendered it impossible for him to return to the charge, ascertain the reason of her coldness, and dispel it by an explanation, without being suspected of mercenary objects. Continually does it happen that a genial willingness to bottle up affronts is set down to interested motives by those who do not know what generous conduct means. Had she occupied the financial position of Miss De Stancy he would readily have persisted further and, not improbably, have cleared up the cloud.

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Having no further interest in Carlsruhe, Somerset decided to leave by an evening train. The intervening hour he spent in wandering into the thick of the fair, where steam roundabouts, the proprietors of wax-work shows, and fancy-stall keepers maintained a deafening din. The animated environment was better than silence, for it fostered in him an artificial indifference to the events that had just happened—an indifference which, though he too well knew it was only destined to be temporary, afforded a passive period wherein to store up strength that should enable him to withstand the wear and tear of regrets which would surely set in soon. It was the case with Somerset as with others of his temperament, that he did not feel a blow of this sort immediately; and what often seemed like stoicism after misfortune was only the neutral numbness of transition from palpitating hope to assured wretchedness.

He walked round and round the fair till all the exhibitors knew him by sight, and when the sun got low he turned into the Erbprinzen-Strasse, now raked from end to end by ensaffroned rays of level light. Seeking his hotel he dined there, and left by the evening train for Heidelberg.

Heidelberg with its romantic surroundings was not precisely the place calculated to heal Somerset's wounded heart. He had known the town of yore, and his recollections of that period, when, unfettered in fancy, he had transferred to his sketch-book the fine Renaissance details of the Otto-Heinrichs-Bau came back with unpleasant force. He knew of some carved cask-heads and other curious wood-work in the castle cellars, copies of which, being unobtainable by photographs, he had intended to make if all went well between Paula and himself. The zest for this was now well-nigh over. But on awaking in the morning and looking up the

valley towards the castle, and at the dark green height of the Königsstuhl alongside, he felt that to become vanquished by a passion, driven to suffer, fast, and pray in the dull pains and vapours of despised love, was a contingency not to be welcomed too readily. Thereupon he set himself to learn the sad science of renunciation, which everybody has to learn in his degree—either rebelling throughout the lesson, or, like Somerset, taking to it kindly by force of judgment. A more obstinate pupil might have altogether escaped the lesson in the present case by discovering its illegality.

Resolving to persevere in the heretofore satisfactory paths of art while life and faculties were left, though every instinct must proclaim that there would be no longer any collateral attraction in that pursuit, he went along under the trees of the Anlage and reached the castle vaults, in whose cool shades he spent the afternoon, working out his intentions with fair result. When he had strolled back to his hotel in the evening the time was approaching for the *table - d'hôte*. Having seated himself rather early, he spent the few minutes of waiting in looking over his pocket-book, and putting a few finishing touches to the afternoon performance whilst the objects were fresh in his memory. Thus occupied he was but dimly conscious of the customary rustle of dresses and pulling up of chairs by the crowd of other diners as they gathered around him. Serving began, and he put away his book and prepared for the meal. He had hardly done this when he became conscious that the person on his left hand was not the typical cosmopolite with boundless hotel knowledge and irrelevant experiences that he was accustomed to find next him, but a face he recognized as that of a young man whom he had met and talked to at Stancy Castle garden-party, whose name he had

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now forgotten. This young fellow was conversing with somebody on his left hand—no other personage than Paula herself. Next to Paula he beheld De Stancy, and De Stancy's sister beyond him. It was one of those gratuitous encounters which only happen to discarded lovers who have shown commendable stoicism under disappointment, as if on purpose to reopen and aggravate their wounds.

It seemed as if the intervening traveller had met the other party by accident there and then. In a minute he turned and recognized Somerset, and by degrees the young men's cursory remarks to each other developed into a pretty regular conversation, interrupted only when he turned to speak to Paula on his left hand.

'Your architectural adviser travels in your party: how very convenient,' said the young tourist to her. 'Far pleasanter than having a medical attendant in one's train!'

Somerset, who had no distractions on the other side of him, could hear every word of this. He glanced at Paula. She had not known of his presence in the room till now. Their eyes met for a second, and she bowed sedately. Somerset returned her bow, and her eyes were quickly withdrawn with scarcely visible confusion.

'Mr. Somerset is not travelling with us,' she said. 'We have met by accident. Mr. Somerset came to me on business a little while ago.'

'I must congratulate you on having put the castle into good hands,' continued the enthusiastic young man.

'I believe Mr. Somerset is quite competent,' said Paula stiffly.

To include Somerset in the conversation the young man turned to him and added: 'You carry on your work at the castle *con amore*, no doubt?'

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‘There is work I should like better,’ said Somerset.

‘Indeed?’

The frigidity of his manner seemed to set her at ease by dispersing all fear of a scene; and alternate dialogues of this sort with the gentleman in their midst were more or less continued by both Paula and Somerset till they rose from table.

In the bustle of moving out the two latter for one moment stood side by side.

‘Miss Power,’ said Somerset, in a low voice that was obscured by the rustle, ‘you have nothing more to say to me?’

‘I think there is nothing more?’ said Paula, lifting her eyes with longing reticence.

‘Then I take leave of you; and tender my best wishes that you may have a pleasant time before you! . . . I set out for England to-night.’

‘With a special photographer, no doubt?’

It was the first time that she had addressed Somerset with a meaning distinctly bitter; and her remark, which had reference to the forged photograph, fell of course without its intended effect.

‘No, Miss Power,’ said Somerset gravely. ‘But with a deeper sense of woman’s thoughtless trifling than time will ever eradicate.’

‘Is not that a mistake?’ she asked in a voice that distinctly trembled.

‘A mistake? How?’

‘I mean, do you not forget many things?’ (throwing on him a troubled glance). ‘A woman may feel herself justified in her conduct, although it admits of no explanation.’

‘I don’t contest the point for a moment. . . . Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye.’

They parted amid the flowering shrubs and caged

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birds in the hall, and he saw her no more. De Stancy came up, and spoke a few commonplace words, his sister having gone out, either without perceiving Somerset, or with intention to avoid him.

That night, as he had said, he was on his way to England.

VII

THE De Stancys and Powers remained in Heidelberg for some days. All remarked that after Somerset's departure Paula was frequently irritable, though at other times as serene as ever. Yet even when in a blithe and saucy mood there was at bottom a tinge of melancholy. Something did not lie easy in her undemonstrative heart, and all her friends excused the inequalities of a humour whose source, though not positively known, could be fairly well guessed.

De Stancy had long since discovered that his chance lay chiefly in her recently acquired and fanciful *prédilection d'artiste* for hoary mediæval families with ancestors in alabaster and primogenitive renown. Seeing this he dwelt on those topics which brought out that aspect of himself more clearly, talking feudalism and chivalry with a zest that he had never hitherto shown. Yet it was not altogether factitious. For, discovering how much this quondam Puritan was interested in the attributes of long-chronicled houses, a reflected interest in himself arose in his own soul, and he began to wonder why he had not prized these things before. Till now disgusted by the failure of his family to hold its own in the turmoil between ancient and modern, he had grown to undervalue its past prestige; and it was with corrective ardour that he adopted while he ministered to her views.

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Henceforward the wooing of De Stancy took the form of an intermittent address, the incidents of their travel furnishing pegs whereon to hang his subject; sometimes hindering it, but seldom failing to produce in her a greater tolerance of his presence. His next opportunity was the day after Somerset's departure from Heidelberg. They stood on the great terrace of the Schloss-Garten, looking across the intervening ravine to the north-east front of the castle which rose before them in all its customary warm tints and battered magnificence.

'This is a spot, if any, which should bring matters to a crisis between you and me,' he asserted good-humouredly. 'But you have been so silent to-day that I lose the spirit to take advantage of my privilege.'

She inquired what privilege he spoke of, as if quite another subject had been in her mind than De Stancy.

'The privilege of winning your heart if I can, which you gave me at Carlsruhe.'

'O,' she said. 'Well, I've been thinking of that. But I do not feel myself absolutely bound by the statement I made in that room; and I shall expect, if I withdraw it, not to be called to account by you.'

De Stancy looked rather blank.

'If you recede from your promise you will doubtless have good reason. But I must solemnly beg you, after raising my hopes, to keep as near as you can to your word, so as not to throw me into utter despair.'

Paula dropped her glance into the Thier-Garten below them, where gay promenaders were clambering up between the bushes and flowers. At length she said, with evident embarrassment, but with much distinctness: 'I deserve much more blame for what I have done than you can express to me. I will confess to you the whole truth. All that I told you in the hotel at Carlsruhe was said in a moment of pique at what had happened just before you came in. It was supposed I was much involved with another man, and circumstances made the

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supposition particularly objectionable. 'To escape it I jumped at the alternative of yourself.'

'That's bad for me!' he murmured.

'If after this avowal you bind me to my words I shall say no more: I do not wish to recede from them without your full permission.'

'What a caprice! But I release you unconditionally,' he said. 'And I beg your pardon if I seemed to show too much assurance. Please put it down to my gratified excitement. I entirely acquiesce in your wish. I will go away to whatever place you please, and not come near you but by your own permission, and till you are quite satisfied that my presence and what it may lead to is not undesirable. I entirely give way before you, and will endeavour to make my future devotedness, if ever we meet again, a new ground for expecting your favour.'

Paula seemed struck by the generous and cheerful fairness of his remarks, and said gently, 'Perhaps your departure is not absolutely necessary for my happiness; and I do not wish from what you call caprice——'

'I retract that word.'

'Well, whatever it is, I don't wish you to do anything which should cause you real pain, or trouble, or humiliation.'

'That's very good of you.'

'But I reserve to myself the right to accept or refuse your addresses—just as if those rash words of mine had never been spoken.'

'I must bear it all as best I can, I suppose,' said De Stancy, with melancholy humorousness.

'And I shall treat you as your behaviour shall seem to deserve,' she said playfully.

'Then I may stay?'

'Yes; I am willing to give you that pleasure, if it is one, in return for the attentions you have shown, and the trouble you have taken to make my journey pleasant.'

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She walked on and discovered Mrs. Goodman near, and presently the whole party met together. De Stancy did not find himself again at her side till later in the afternoon, when they had left the immediate precincts of the castle and decided on a drive to the Königsstuhl.

The carriage, containing only Mrs. Goodman, was driven a short way up the winding incline, Paula, her uncle, and Miss De Stancy walking behind under the shadow of the trees. Then Mrs. Goodman called to them and asked when they were going to join her.

‘We are going to walk up,’ said Mr. Power.

Paula seemed seized with a spirit of boisterousness quite unlike her usual behaviour. ‘My aunt may drive up, and you may walk up; but I shall run up,’ she said. ‘See, here’s a way.’ She tripped towards a path through the bushes which, instead of winding like the regular track, made straight for the summit.

Paula had not the remotest conception of the actual distance to the top, imagining it to be but a couple of hundred yards at the outside, whereas it was really nearer a mile, the ascent being uniformly steep all the way. When her uncle and De Stancy had seen her vanish they stood still, the former evidently reluctant to forsake the easy ascent for a difficult one, though he said, ‘We can’t let her go alone that way, I suppose.’

‘No, of course not,’ said De Stancy.

They then followed in the direction taken by Paula, Charlotte entering the carriage. When Power and De Stancy had ascended about fifty yards the former looked back, and dropped off from the pursuit, to return to the easy route, giving his companion a parting hint concerning Paula. Whereupon De Stancy went on alone. He soon saw Paula above him in the path, which ascended skyward straight as Jacob’s Ladder, but was so overhung by the brushwood as to be quite

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shut out from the sun. When he reached her side she was moving easily upward, apparently enjoying the seclusion which the place afforded.

‘Is not my uncle with you?’ she said, on turning and seeing him.

‘He went back,’ said De Stancy.

She replied that it was of no consequence; that she should meet him at the top, she supposed.

Paula looked up amid the green light which filtered through the leafage as far as her eyes could stretch. But the top did not appear, and she allowed De Stancy to get in front. ‘It did not seem such a long way as this, to look at,’ she presently said.

He explained that the trees had deceived her as to the real height, by reason of her seeing the slope foreshortened when she looked up from the castle. ‘Allow me to help you,’ he added.

‘No, thank you,’ said Paula lightly; ‘we must be near the top.’

They went on again; but no Königsstuhl. When next De Stancy turned he found that she was sitting down; immediately going back he offered his arm. She took it in silence, declaring that it was no wonder her uncle did not come that wearisome way, if he had ever been there before.

De Stancy did not explain that Mr. Power had said to him at parting, ‘There’s a chance for you, if you want one,’ but at once went on with the subject begun on the terrace. ‘If my behaviour is good, you will reaffirm the statement made at Carlsruhe?’

‘It is not fair to begin that now!’ expostulated Paula; ‘I can only think of getting to the top.’

Her colour deepening by the exertion, he suggested that she should sit down again on one of the mossy boulders by the wayside. Nothing loth she did, De Stancy standing by, and with his cane scratching the moss from the stone.

‘This is rather awkward,’ said Paula, in her usual circumspect way. ‘My relatives and your sister will be sure to suspect me of having arranged this scramble with you.’

‘But I know better,’ sighed De Stancy. ‘I wish to Heaven you had arranged it!’

She was not at the top, but she took advantage of the halt to answer his previous question. ‘There are many points on which I must be satisfied before I can reaffirm anything. Do you not see that you are mistaken in clinging to this idea?—that you are laying up mortification and disappointment for yourself?’

‘A negative reply from you would be disappointment, early or late.’

‘And you prefer having it late to accepting it now? If I were a man, I should like to abandon a false scent as soon as possible.’

‘I suppose all that has but one meaning: that I am to go.’

‘O no,’ she magnanimously assured him, bounding up from her seat; ‘I adhere to my statement that you may stay; though it is true something may possibly happen to make me alter my mind.’

He again offered his arm, and from sheer necessity she leant upon it as before.

‘Grant me but a moment’s patience,’ he began.

‘Captain De Stancy! Is this fair? I am physically obliged to hold your arm, so that I *must* listen to what you say!’

‘No, it is not fair; ’pon my soul it is not!’ said De Stancy. ‘I won’t say another word.’

He did not; and they clambered on through the boughs, nothing disturbing the solitude but the rustle of their own footsteps and the singing of birds overhead. They occasionally got a peep at the sky; and whenever a twig hung out in a position to strike Paula’s face the

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gallant captain bent it aside with his stick. But she did not thank him. Perhaps he was just as well satisfied as if she had done so.

Paula, panting, broke the silence : 'Will you go on, and discover if the top is near?'

He went on. This time the top was near. When he returned she was sitting where he had left her among the leaves. 'It is quite near now,' he told her tenderly, and she took his arm again without a word. Soon the path changed its nature from a steep and rugged water-course to a level green promenade.

'Thank you, Captain De Stancy,' she said, letting go his arm as if relieved.

Before them rose the tower, and at the base they beheld two of their friends, Mr. Power being seen above, looking over the parapet through his glass.

'You will go to the top now?' said De Stancy.

'No, I take no interest in it. My interest has turned to fatigue. I only want to go home.'

He took her on to where the carriage stood at the foot of the tower, and leaving her with his sister ascended the turret to the top. The landscape had quite changed from its afternoon appearance, and had become rather marvellous than beautiful. The air was charged with a lurid exhalation that blurred the extensive view. He could see the distant Rhine at its junction with the Neckar, shining like a thread of blood through the mist which was gradually wrapping up the declining sun. The scene had in it something that was more than melancholy, and not much less than tragic; but for De Stancy such evening effects possessed little meaning. He was engaged in an enterprise that taxed all his resources, and had no sentiments to spare for air, earth, or skies.

'Remarkable scene,' said Power, mildly, at his elbow.

'Yes; I dare say it is,' said De Stancy. 'Time has been when I should have held forth upon such a pros-

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pect, and wondered if its livid colours shadowed out my own life, et cætera, et cætera. But, begad, I have almost forgotten there's such a thing as Nature, and I care for nothing but a comfortable life, and a certain woman who does not care for me! . . . Now shall we go down?'

VIII

IT was quite true that De Stancy at the present period of his existence wished only to escape from the hurly-burly of active life, and to win the affection of Paula Power. There were, however, occasions when a recollection of his old renunciatory vows would obtrude itself upon him, and tinge his present with wayward bitterness. So much was this the case that a day or two after they had arrived at Mainz he could not refrain from making remarks almost prejudicial to his cause, saying to her, 'I am unfortunate in my situation. There are, unhappily, worldly reasons why I should pretend to love you, even if I do not: they are so strong that, though really loving you, perhaps they enter into my thoughts of you.'

'I don't want to know what such reasons are,' said Paula, with promptness, for it required but little astuteness to discover that he alluded to the alienated Wessex home and estates. 'You lack tone,' she gently added: 'that's why the situation of affairs seems distasteful to you.'

'Yes, I suppose I am ill. And yet I am well enough.'

These remarks passed under a tree in the public gardens during an odd minute of waiting for Charlotte and Mrs. Goodman; and he said no more to her in

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private that day. Few as her words had been he liked them better than any he had lately received. The conversation was not resumed till they were gliding 'between the banks that bear the vine,' on board one of the Rhine steamboats, which, like the hotels in this early summer time, were comparatively free from other English travellers; so that everywhere Paula and her party were received with open arms and cheerful countenances, as among the first swallows of the season.

The saloon of the steamboat was quite empty, the few passengers being outside; and this paucity of voyagers afforded De Stancy a roomy opportunity.

Paula saw him approach her, and there appearing in his face signs that he would begin again on the eternal subject, she seemed to be struck with a sense of the ludicrous.

De Stancy reddened. 'Something seems to amuse you,' he said.

'It is over,' she replied, becoming serious.

'Was it about me, and this unhappy fever in me?'

'If I speak the truth I must say it was.'

'You thought, "Here's that absurd man again, going to begin his daily supplication."'

'Not "absurd,"' she said, with emphasis; 'because I don't think it is absurd.'

She continued looking through the windows at the Lurlei Heights under which they were now passing, and he remained with his eyes on her.

'May I stay here with you?' he said at last. 'I have not had a word with you alone for four-and-twenty hours.'

'You must be cheerful, then.'

'You have said such as that before. I wish you would say "loving" instead of "cheerful."'

'Yes, I know, I know,' she responded, with impatient perplexity. 'But why must you think of me—'

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me only? Is there no other woman in the world who has the power to make you happy? I am sure there must be.'

'Perhaps there is; but I have never seen her.'

'Then look for her; and believe me when I say that you will certainly find her.'

He shook his head.

'Captain De Stancy, I have long felt for you,' she continued, with a frank glance into his face. 'You have deprived yourself too long of other women's company. Why not go away for a little time? and when you have found somebody else likely to make you happy, you can meet me again. I will see you at your father's house, and we will enjoy all the pleasure of easy friendship.'

'Very correct; and very cold, O best of women!'

'You are too full of exclamations and transports, I think!'

They stood in silence, Paula apparently much interested in the manœuvring of a raft which was passing by. 'Dear Miss Power,' he resumed, 'before I go and join your uncle above, let me just ask, Do I stand any chance at all yet? Is it possible you can never be more pliant than you have been?'

'You put me out of all patience!'

'But why did you raise my hopes? You should at least pity me after doing that.'

'Yes; it's that again! I unfortunately raised your hopes because I was a fool—was not myself that moment. Now question me no more. As it is I think you presume too much upon my becoming yours as the consequence of my having dismissed another.'

'Not on becoming mine, but on listening to me.'

'Your argument would be reasonable enough had I led you to believe I would listen to you—and ultimately accept you; but that I have not done. I see now that a woman who gives a man an answer one shade less peremptory than a harsh negative may be carried beyond

her intentions, and out of her own power before she knows it.'

'Chide me if you will; I don't care!'

She looked steadfastly at him with a little mischief in her eyes. 'You *do* care,' she said.

'Then why don't you listen to me? I would not persevere for a moment longer if it were against the wishes of your family. Your uncle says it would give him pleasure to see you accept me.'

'Does he say why?' she asked thoughtfully.

'Yes; he takes, of course, a practical view of the matter; he thinks it commends itself so to reason and common sense that the owner of Stancy Castle should become a member of the De Stancy family.'

'Yes, that's the horrid plague of it,' she said, with a nonchalance which seemed to contradict her words. 'It is so dreadfully reasonable that we should marry. I wish it wasn't!'

'Well, you are younger than I, and perhaps that's a natural wish. But to me it seems a felicitous combination not often met with. I confess that your interest in our family before you knew me lent a stability to my hopes that otherwise they would not have had.'

'My interest in the De Stancys has not been a personal interest except in the case of your sister,' she returned. 'It has been an historical interest only; and is not at all increased by your existence.'

'And perhaps it is not diminished?'

'No, I am not aware that it is diminished,' she murmured, as she observed the gliding shore.

'Well, you will allow me to say this, since I say it without reference to your personality or to mine—that the Power and De Stancy families are the complements to each other; and that, abstractedly, they call earnestly to one another: "How neat and fit a thing for us to join hands!"'

Paula, who was not prudish when a direct appeal

was made to her common sense, answered with ready candour: 'Yes, from the point of view of domestic politics, that undoubtedly is the case. But I hope I am not so calculating as to risk happiness in order to round off a social idea.'

'I hope not; or that I am either. Still the social idea exists, and my increased years make its excellence more obvious to me than to you.'

The ice once broken on this aspect of the question, the subject seemed further to engross her, and she spoke on as if daringly inclined to venture where she had never anticipated going, deriving pleasure from the very strangeness of her temerity: 'You mean that in the fitness of things I ought to become a De Stancy to strengthen my social position?'

'And that I ought to strengthen mine by alliance with the heiress of a name so dear to engineering science as Power.'

'Well, we are talking with unexpected frankness.'

'But you are not seriously displeased with me for saying what, after all, one can't help feeling and thinking?'

'No. Only be so good as to leave off going further for the present. Indeed, of the two, I would rather have the other sort of address. I mean,' she hastily added, 'that what you urge as the result of a real affection, however unsuitable, I have some remote satisfaction in listening to—not the least from any reciprocal love on my side, but from a woman's gratification at being the object of anybody's devotion; for that feeling towards her is always regarded as a merit in a woman's eye, and taken as a kindness by her, even when it is at the expense of her convenience.'

She had said, voluntarily or involuntarily, better things than he expected, and perhaps too much in her own opinion, for she hardly gave him an opportunity of replying.

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They passed St. Goar and Boppard, and when steering round the sharp bend of the river just beyond the latter place De Stancy met her again, exclaiming, 'You left me very suddenly.'

'You must make allowances, please,' she said; 'I have always stood in need of them.'

'Then you shall always have them.'

'I don't doubt it,' she said quickly; but Paula was not to be caught again, and kept close to the side of her aunt while they glided past Brauback and Oberlahnstein. Approaching Coblenz her aunt said, 'Paula, let me suggest that you be not so much alone with Captain De Stancy.'

'And why?' said Paula quietly.

'You'll have plenty of offers if you want them, without taking trouble,' said the direct Mrs. Goodman. 'Your existence is hardly known to the world yet, and Captain De Stancy is too near middle-age for a girl like you.' Paula did not reply to either of these remarks, being seemingly so interested in Ehrenbreitstein's heights as not to hear them.

IX

IT was midnight at Coblenz, and the travellers had retired to rest in their respective apartments, overlooking the river. Finding that there was a moon shining, Paula leant out of her window. The tall rock of Ehrenbreitstein on the opposite shore was flooded with light, and a belated steamer was drawing up to the landing-stage, where it presently deposited its passengers.

‘We should have come by the last boat, so as to have been touched into romance by the rays of this moon, like those happy people,’ said a voice.

She looked towards the spot whence the voice proceeded, which was a window quite near at hand. De Stancy was smoking outside it, and she became aware that the words were addressed to her.

‘You left me very abruptly,’ he continued.

Paula’s instinct of caution impelled her to speak. ‘The windows are all open,’ she murmured. ‘Please be careful.’

‘There are no English in this hotel except ourselves. I thank you for what you said to-day.’

‘Please be careful,’ she repeated.

‘My dear Miss P——’

‘Don’t mention names, and don’t continue the subject!’

‘Life and death perhaps depend upon my renewing it soon!’

She shut the window decisively, possibly wondering if De Stancy had drunk a glass or two of Steinberg more than was good for him, and saw no more of moonlit Ehrenbreitstein that night, and heard no more of De Stancy. But it was some time before he closed his window, and previous to doing so saw a dark form at an adjoining one on the other side.

It was Mr. Power, also taking the air.

‘Well, what luck to-day?’ said Power.

‘A decided advance,’ said De Stancy.

None of the speakers knew that a little person in the room above heard all this out-of-window talk. Charlotte, though not looking out, had left her case-ment open; and what reached her ears set her wondering as to the result.

It is not necessary to detail in full De Stancy’s imperceptible advances with Paula during that northward journey—so slowly performed that it seemed as if she must perceive there was a special reason for delaying her return to England. At Cologne one day he conveniently overtook her when she was ascending the hotel staircase. Seeing him, she went to the window of the entresol landing, which commanded a view of the Rhine, meaning that he should pass by to his room.

‘I have been very uneasy,’ began the captain, drawing up to her side; ‘and I am obliged to trouble you sooner than I meant to do.’

Paula turned her eyes upon him with some curiosity as to what was coming of this respectful demeanour. ‘Indeed!’ she said.

He then informed her that he had been overhauling himself since they last talked, and had some reason to blame himself for bluntness and general want of euphemism; which, although he had meant nothing by

it, must have been very disagreeable to her. But he had always aimed at sincerity, particularly as he had to deal with a lady who despised hypocrisy and was above flattery. However, he feared he might have carried his disregard for conventionality too far. But from that time he would promise that she should find an alteration by which he hoped he might return the friendship at least of a young lady he honoured more than any other in the world.

This retrograde movement was evidently unexpected by the honoured young lady herself. After being so long accustomed to rebuke him for his persistence there was novelty in finding him do the work for her. The guess might even have been hazarded that there was also disappointment.

Still looking across the river at the bridge of boats which stretched to the opposite suburb of Deutz: 'You need not blame yourself,' she said, with the mildest conceivable manner, 'I can make allowances. All I wish is that you should remain under no misapprehension.'

'I comprehend,' he said thoughtfully. 'But since, by a perverse fate, I have been thrown into your company, you could hardly expect me to feel and act otherwise.'

'Perhaps not.'

'Since I have so much reason to be dissatisfied with myself,' he added, 'I cannot refrain from criticizing elsewhere to a slight extent, and thinking I have to do with an ungenerous person.'

'Why ungenerous?'

'In this way; that since you cannot love me, you see no reason at all for trying to do so in the fact that I so deeply love you; hence I say that you are rather to be distinguished by your wisdom than by your humanity.'

'It comes to this, that if your words are all seriously

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meant it is much to be regretted we ever met,' she murmured. 'Now will you go on to where you were going, and leave me here?'

Without a remonstrance he went on, saying with dejected whimsicality as he smiled back upon her, 'You show a wisdom which for so young a lady is perfectly surprising.'

It was resolved to prolong the journey by a circuit through Holland and Belgium; but nothing changed in the attitudes of Paula and Captain De Stancy till one afternoon during their stay at the Hague, when they had gone for a drive down to Scheveningen by the long straight avenue of chestnuts and limes, under whose boughs tufts of wild parsley waved their flowers, except where the *buitenplaatsen* of retired merchants blazed forth with new paint of every hue. On mounting the dune which kept out the sea behind the village a brisk breeze greeted their faces, and a fine sand blew up into their eyes. De Stancy screened Paula with his umbrella as they stood with their backs to the wind, looking down on the red roofs of the village within the sea wall, and pulling at the long grass which by some means found nourishment in the powdery soil of the dune.

When they had discussed the scene he continued, 'It always seems to me that this place reflects the average mood of human life. I mean, if we strike the balance between our best moods and our worst we shall find our average condition to stand at about the same pitch in emotional colour as these sandy dunes and this grey scene do in landscape.'

Paula contended that he ought not to measure everybody by himself.

'I have no other standard,' said De Stancy; 'and if my own is wrong, it is you who have made it so. Have you thought any more of what I said at Cologne?'

'I don't quite remember what you did say at Cologne?'

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‘My dearest life!’ Paula’s eyes rounding somewhat, he corrected the exclamation. ‘My dear Miss Power, I will, without reserve, tell it to you all over again.’

‘Pray spare yourself the effort,’ she said drily. ‘What has that one fatal step betrayed me into! . . . Do you seriously mean to say that I am the cause of your life being coloured like this scene of grass and sand? If so, I have committed a very great fault!’

‘It can be nullified by a word.’

‘Such a word!’

‘It is a very short one.’

‘There’s a still shorter one more to the purpose. Frankly, I believe you suspect me to have some latent and unowned inclination for you—that you think speaking is the only point upon which I am backward. . . . There now, it is raining; what shall we do? I thought this wind meant rain.’

‘Do? Stand on here, as we are standing now.’

‘Your sister and my aunt are gone under the wall. I think we will walk towards them.’

‘You had made me hope,’ he continued (his thoughts apparently far away from the rain and the wind and the possibility of shelter), ‘that you might change your mind, and give to your original promise a liberal meaning in renewing it. In brief I mean this, that you would allow it to merge into an engagement. Don’t think it presumptuous,’ he went on, as he held the umbrella over her; ‘I am sure any man would speak as I do. A distinct permission to be with you on probation—that was what you gave me at Carlsruhe: and flinging casuistry on one side, what does that mean?’

‘That I am artistically interested in your family history.’ And she went out from the umbrella to the shelter of the hotel where she found her aunt and friend.

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De Stancy could not but feel that his persistence had made some impression. It was hardly possible that a woman of independent nature would have tolerated his dangling at her side so long, if his presence were wholly distasteful to her. That evening when driving back to the Hague by a devious route through the dense avenues of the Bosch he conversed with her again; also the next day when standing by the Vijver looking at the swans; and in each case she seemed to have at least got over her objection to being seen talking to him, apart from the remainder of the travelling party.

Scenes very similar to those at Scheveningen and on the Rhine were enacted at later stages of their desultory journey. Mr. Power had proposed to cross from Rotterdam; but a stiff north-westerly breeze prevailing Paula herself became reluctant to hasten back to Stancy Castle. Turning abruptly they made for Brussels.

It was here, while walking homeward from the Park one morning, that her uncle for the first time alluded to the situation of affairs between herself and her admirer. The captain had gone up the Rue Royale with his sister and Mrs. Goodman, either to show them the house in which the ball took place on the eve of Quatre Bras or some other site of interest, and the two Powers were thus left to themselves. To reach their hotel they passed into a little street sloping steeply down from the Rue Royale to the Place Ste. Gudule, where, at the moment of nearing the cathedral, a wedding party emerged from the porch and crossed in front of uncle and niece.

‘I hope,’ said the former, in his passionless way, ‘we shall see a performance of this sort between you and Captain De Stancy, not so very long after our return to England.’

‘Why?’ asked Paula, following the bride with her eyes.

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‘It is diplomatically, as I may say, such a highly correct thing—such an expedient thing—such an obvious thing to all eyes.’

‘Not altogether to mine, uncle,’ she returned.

‘’Twould be a thousand pities to let slip such a neat offer of adjusting difficulties as accident makes you in this. You could marry more tin, that’s true; but you don’t want it, Paula. You want a name, and historic what-do-they-call-it. Now by coming to terms with the captain you’ll be Lady De Stancy in a few years: and a title which is useless to him, and a fortune and castle which are in some degree useless to you, will make a splendid whole useful to you both.’

‘I’ve thought it over—quite,’ she answered. ‘And I quite see what the advantages are. But how if I don’t care one atom for artistic completeness and a splendid whole; and do care very much to do what my fancy inclines me to do?’

‘Then I should say that, taking a comprehensive view of human nature of all colours, your fancy is about the silliest fancy existing on this earthly ball.’

Paula laughed indifferently, and her uncle felt that, persistent as was his nature, he was the wrong man to influence her by argument. Paula’s blindness to the advantages of the match, if she were blind, was that of a woman who wouldn’t see, and the best argument was silence.

This was in some measure proved the next morning. When Paula made her appearance Mrs. Goodman said, holding up an envelope: ‘Here’s a letter from Mr. Somerset.’

‘Dear me,’ said she blandly, though a quick little flush ascended her cheek. ‘I had nearly forgotten him!’

The letter on being read contained a request as brief as it was unexpected. Having prepared all the drawings necessary for the rebuilding, Somerset begged

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leave to resign the superintendence of the work into other hands.

‘His letter caps your remarks very aptly,’ said Mrs. Goodman, with secret triumph. ‘You are nearly forgetting him, and he is quite forgetting you.’

‘Yes,’ said Paula, affecting carelessness. Well, I must get somebody else, I suppose.’

X

THEY next deviated to Amiens, intending to stay there only one night; but their schemes were deranged by the sudden illness of Charlotte. She had been looking unwell for a fortnight past, though, with her usual self-abnegation, she had made light of her ailment. Even now she declared she could go on; but this was said over-night, and in the morning it was abundantly evident that to move her was highly inadvisable. Still she was not in serious danger, and having called in a physician, who pronounced rest indispensable, they prepared to remain in the old Picard capital two or three additional days. Mr. Power thought he would take advantage of the halt to run up to Paris, leaving De Stancy in charge of the ladies.

In more ways than in the illness of Charlotte this day was the harbinger of a crisis.

It was a summer evening without a cloud. Charlotte had fallen asleep in her bed, and Paula, who had been sitting by her, looked out into the Place St. Denis, which the hotel commanded. The lawn of the square was all ablaze with red and yellow clumps of flowers, the acacia trees were brightly green, the sun was soft and low. Tempted by the prospect Paula went and put on her hat; and arousing her aunt, who was nodding in the next room, to request her to keep an ear on

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Charlotte's bedroom, Paula descended into the Rue de Noyon alone, and entered the green enclosure.

While she walked round, two or three little children in charge of a nurse trundled a large variegated ball along the grass, and it rolled to Paula's feet. She smiled at them, and endeavoured to return it by a slight kick. The ball rose in the air, and passing over the back of a seat which stood under one of the trees, alighted in the lap of a gentleman hitherto screened by its boughs. The back and shoulders proved to be those of De Stancy. He turned his head, jumped up, and was at her side in an instant, a nettled flush having meanwhile crossed Paula's face.

'I thought you had gone to the Hotoie Promenade,' she said hastily. 'I am going to the cathedral;' (obviously uttered lest it should seem that she had seen him from the hotel windows, and entered the square for his company).

'Of course: there is nothing else to go to here—even for Roundheads.'

'If you mean *me* by that, you are very much mistaken,' said she testily.

'The Roundheads were your ancestors, and they knocked down my ancestors' castle, and broke the stained glass and statuary of the cathedral,' said De Stancy slyly; 'and now you go not only to a cathedral, but to a service of the unreformed Church in it.'

'In a foreign country it is different from home,' said Paula in extenuation; 'and you of all men should not reproach me for tergiversation—when it has been brought about by—by my sympathies with——'

'With the troubles of the De Stancys.'

'Well, you know what I mean,' she answered, with considerable anxiety not to be misunderstood; 'my liking for the old castle, and what it contains, and what it suggests. I declare I will not explain to you further—why should I? I am not answerable to you!'

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Paula's show of petulance was perhaps not wholly because she had appeared to seek him, but also from being reminded by his criticism that Mr. Woodwell's prophecy on her weakly succumbing to surroundings was slowly working out its fulfilment.

She moved forward towards the gate at the further end of the square, beyond which the cathedral lay at a very short distance. Paula did not turn her head, and De Stancy strolled slowly after her down the Rue du College. The day happened to be one of the church festivals, and people were a second time flocking into the lofty monument of Catholicism at its meridian. Paula vanished into the porch with the rest; and, almost catching the wicket as it flew back from her hand, he too entered the high-shouldered edifice—an edifice doomed to labour under the melancholy misfortune of seeming only half as vast as it really is, and as truly as whimsically described by Heine as a monument built with the strength of Titans, and decorated with the patience of dwarfs.

De Stancy walked up the nave, so close beside her as to touch her dress; but she would not recognize his presence; the darkness that evening had thrown over the interior, which was scarcely broken by the few candles dotted about, being a sufficient excuse if she required one.

‘Miss Power,’ De Stancy said at last, ‘I am coming to the service with you.’

She received the intelligence without surprise, and he knew she had been conscious of him all the way.

Paula went no further than the middle of the nave, where there was hardly a soul, and took a chair beside a solitary rushlight which looked amid the vague gloom of the inaccessible architecture like a lighthouse at the foot of tall cliffs.

He put his hand on the next chair, saying, ‘Do you object?’

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‘Not at all,’ she replied ; and he sat down.

‘Suppose we go into the choir,’ said De Stancy presently. ‘Nobody sits out here in the shadows.’

‘This is sufficiently near, and we have a candle,’ Paula murmured.

Before another minute had passed the candle flame began to drown in its own grease, slowly dwindled, and went out.

‘I suppose that means I am to go into the choir in spite of myself. Heaven is on your side,’ said Paula. And rising they left their now totally dark corner, and joined the noiseless shadowy figures who in twos and threes kept passing up the nave.

Within the choir there was a blaze of light, partly from the altar, and more particularly from the image of the saint whom they had assembled to honour, which stood, surrounded by candles and a thicket of flowering plants, some way in advance of the foot-pace. A secondary radiance from the same source was reflected upward into their faces by the polished marble pavement, except when interrupted by the shady forms of the officiating priests.

When it was over and the people were moving off, De Stancy and his companion went towards the saint, now besieged by numbers of women anxious to claim the respective flower-pots they had lent for the decoration. As each struggled for her own, seized and marched off with it, Paula remarked—‘This rather spoils the solemn effect of what has gone before.’

‘I perceive you are a harsh Puritan.’

‘No, Captain De Stancy ! Why will you speak so ? I am far too much otherwise. I have grown to be so much of your way of thinking, that I accuse myself, and am accused by others, of being worldly, and half-and-half, and other dreadful things—though it isn’t that at all.’

They were now walking down the nave, preceded by

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the sombre figures with the pot flowers, who were just visible in the rays that reached them through the distant choir screen at their back; while above the grey night sky and stars looked in upon them through the high clerestory windows.

‘Do be a little *more* of my way of thinking!’ rejoined De Stancy passionately.

‘Don’t, don’t speak,’ she said rapidly. ‘There are Milly and Champreau!’

Milly was one of the maids, and Champreau the courier and valet who had been engaged by Abner Power. They had been sitting behind the other pair throughout the service, and indeed knew rather more of the relations between Paula and De Stancy than Paula knew herself.

Hastening on the two latter went out, and walked together silently up the short street. The Place St. Denis was now lit up, lights shone from the hotel windows, and the world without the cathedral had so far advanced in nocturnal change that it seemed as if they had been gone from it for hours. Within the hotel they found the change even greater than without. Mrs. Goodman met them half-way on the stairs.

‘Poor Charlotte is worse,’ she said. ‘Quite feverish, and almost delirious.’

Paula reproached herself with ‘Why did I go away!’

The common interest of De Stancy and Paula in the sufferer at once reproduced an ease between them as nothing else could have done. The physician was again called in, who prescribed certain draughts, and recommended that some one should sit up with her that night. If Paula allowed demonstrations of love to escape her towards anybody it was towards Charlotte, and her instinct was at once to watch by the invalid’s couch herself, at least for some hours, it being deemed unnecessary to call in a regular nurse unless she should sicken further.

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‘But I will sit with her,’ said De Stancy. ‘Surely you had better go to bed?’ Paula would not be persuaded; and thereupon De Stancy, saying he was going into the town for a short time before retiring, left the room.

The last omnibus returned from the last train, and the inmates of the hotel retired to rest. Meanwhile a telegram had arrived for Captain De Stancy; but as he had not yet returned it was put in his bedroom, with directions to the night-porter to remind him of its arrival.

Paula sat on with the sleeping Charlotte. Presently she retired into the adjacent sitting-room with a book, and flung herself on a couch, leaving the door open between her and her charge, in case the latter should awake. While she sat a new breathing seemed to mingle with the regular sound of Charlotte’s that reached her through the doorway: she turned quickly, and saw her uncle standing behind her.

‘O—I thought you were in Paris!’ said Paula.

‘I have just come from there—I could not stay. Something has occurred to my mind about this affair.’ His strangely marked visage, now more noticeable from being worn with fatigue, had a spectral effect by the night-light.

‘What affair?’

‘This marriage. . . . Paula, De Stancy is a good fellow enough, but you must not accept him just yet.’

Paula did not answer.

‘Do you hear? You must not accept him,’ repeated her uncle, ‘till I have been to England and examined into matters. I start in an hour’s time—by the ten-minutes-past-two train.’

‘This is something very new!’

‘Yes—’tis new,’ he murmured, relapsing into his Dutch manner. ‘You must not accept him till something is made clear to me—something about a queer relationship. I have come from Paris to say so.’

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‘Uncle, I don’t understand this. I am my own mistress in all matters, and though I don’t mind telling you I have by no means resolved to accept him, the question of her marriage is especially a woman’s own affair.’

Her uncle stood irresolute for a moment, as if his convictions were more than his proofs. ‘I say no more at present,’ he murmured. ‘Can I do anything for you about a new architect?’

‘Appoint Havill.’

‘Very well. Good night.’ And then he left her. In a short time she heard him go down and out of the house to cross to England by the morning steamboat.

With a little shrug, as if she resented his interference in so delicate a point, she settled herself down anew to her book.

One, two, three hours passed, when Charlotte awoke, but soon slumbered sweetly again. Milly had stayed up for some time lest her mistress should require anything; but the girl being sleepy Paula sent her to bed.

It was a lovely night of early summer, and drawing aside the window curtains she looked out upon the flowers and trees of the Place, now quite visible, for it was nearly three o’clock, and the morning light was growing strong. She turned her face upwards. Except in the case of one bedroom all the windows on that side of the hotel were in darkness. The room being rather close she left the casement ajar, and opening the door walked out upon the staircase landing. A number of caged canaries were kept here, and she observed in the dim light of the landing lamp how snugly their heads were all tucked in. On returning to the sitting-room again she could hear that Charlotte was still slumbering, and this encouraging circumstance disposed her to go to bed herself. Before, however, she had made a move a gentle tap came to the door.

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Paula opened it. There, in the faint light by the sleeping canaries, stood Charlotte's brother.

'How is she now?' he whispered.

'Sleeping soundly,' said Paula.

'That's a blessing. I have not been to bed. I came in late, and have now come down to know if I had not better take your place?'

'Nobody is required, I think. But you can judge for yourself.'

Up to this point they had conversed in the doorway of the sitting-room, which De Stancy now entered, crossing it to Charlotte's apartment. He came out from the latter at a pensive pace.

'She is doing well,' he said gently. 'You have been very good to her. Was the chair I saw by her bed the one you have been sitting in all night?'

'I sometimes sat there; sometimes here.'

'I wish I could have sat beside you, and held your hand—I speak frankly.'

'To excess.'

'And why not? I do not wish to hide from you any corner of my breast, futile as candour may be. Just Heaven! for what reason is it ordered that courtship, in which soldiers are usually so successful, should be a failure with me?'

'Your lack of foresight chiefly in indulging feelings that were not encouraged. That, and my uncle's indiscreet permission to you to travel with us, have precipitated our relations in a way that I could neither foresee nor avoid, though of late I have had apprehensions that it might come to this. You vex and disturb me by such words of regret.'

'Not more than you vex and disturb me. But you cannot hate the man who loves you so devotedly?'

'I have said before I don't hate you. I repeat that I am interested in your family and its associations

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because of its complete contrast with my own.' She might have added, 'And I am additionally interested just now because my uncle has forbidden me to be.'

'But you don't care enough for me personally to save my happiness.'

Paula hesitated; from the moment De Stancy confronted her she had felt that this nocturnal conversation was to be a grave business. The cathedral clock struck three. 'I have thought once or twice,' she said with a naïveté unusual in her, 'that if I could be sure of giving peace and joy to your mind by becoming your wife, I ought to endeavour to do so and make the best of it—merely as a charity. But I believe that feeling is a mistake: your discontent is constitutional, and would go on just the same whether I accepted you or no. My refusal of you is purely an imaginary grievance.'

'Not if I think otherwise.'

'O no,' she murmured, with a sense that the place was very lonely and silent. 'If you think it otherwise, I suppose it is otherwise.'

'My darling; my Paula!' he said, seizing her hand. 'Do promise me something. You must indeed!'

'Captain De Stancy!' she said, trembling and turning away. 'Captain De Stancy!' She tried to withdraw her fingers, then faced him, exclaiming in a firm voice a third time, 'Captain De Stancy! let go my hand; for I tell you I will not marry you!'

'Good God!' he cried, dropping her hand. 'What have I driven you to say in your anger! Retract it—O, retract it!'

'Don't urge me further, as you value my good opinion!'

'To lose you now, is to lose you for ever. Come, please answer!'

'I won't be compelled!' she interrupted with vehemence. 'I am resolved not to be yours—not to

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give you an answer to-night! Never, never will I be reasoned out of my intention; and I say I won't answer you to-night! I should never have let you be so much with me but for pity of you; and now it is come to this!'

She had sunk into a chair, and now leaned upon her hand, and buried her face in her handkerchief. He had never caused her any such agitation as this before.

'You stab me with your words,' continued De Stancy. 'The experience I have had with you is without parallel, Paula. It seems like a distracting dream.'

'I won't be hurried by anybody!'

'That may mean anything,' he said, with a perplexed, passionate air. 'Well, mine is a fallen family, and we must abide caprices. Would to Heaven it were extinguished!'

'What was extinguished?' she murmured.

'The De Stancys. Here am I, a homeless wanderer, living on my pay; in the next room lies she, my sister, a poor little fragile feverish invalid with no social position—and hardly a friend. We two represent the De Stancy line; and I wish we were behind the iron door of our old vault at Sleeping-Green. It can be seen by looking at us and our circumstances that we cry for the earth and oblivion!'

'Captain De Stancy, it is not like that, I assure you,' sympathized Paula with damp eyelashes. 'I love Charlotte too dearly for you to talk like that, indeed. I don't want to marry you exactly: and yet I cannot bring myself to say I permanently reject you, because I remember you are Charlotte's brother, and do not wish to be the cause of any morbid feelings in you which would ruin your future prospects.'

'My dear life, what is it you doubt in me? Your earnestness not to do me harm makes it all the

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harder for me to think of never being more than a friend.'

'Well, I have not positively refused!' she exclaimed, in mixed tones of pity and distress. 'Let me think it over a little while. It is not generous to urge so strongly before I can collect my thoughts, and at this midnight time!'

'Darling, forgive it!—There, I'll say no more.'

He then offered to sit up in her place for the remainder of the night; but Paula declined, assuring him that she meant to stay only another half-hour, after which nobody would be necessary.

He had already crossed the landing to ascend to his room, when she stepped after him, and asked if he had received his telegram.

'No,' said De Stancy. 'Nor have I heard of one.'

Paula explained that it was put in his room, that he might see it the moment he came in.

'It matters very little,' he replied, 'since I shall see it now. Good-night, dearest: good-night!' he added tenderly.

She gravely shook her head. 'It is not for you to express yourself like that,' she answered. 'Good-night, Captain De Stancy.'

He went up the stairs to the second floor, and Paula returned to the sitting-room. Having left a light burning De Stancy proceeded to look for the telegram, and found it on the carpet, where it had been swept from the table. When he had opened the sheet a sudden solemnity overspread his face. He sat down, rested his elbow on the table, and his forehead on his hands.

Captain De Stancy did not remain thus long. Rising he went softly downstairs. The grey morning had by this time crept into the hotel, rendering a light no longer necessary. The old clock on the landing was within a few minutes of four, and the birds were

hopping up and down their cages, and whetting their bills. He tapped at the sitting-room, and she came instantly.

‘But I told you it was not necessary——’ she began.

‘Yes, but the telegram,’ he said hurriedly. ‘I wanted to let you know first that—it is very serious. Paula—my father is dead! He died suddenly yesterday, and I must go at once. . . . About Charlotte—and how to let her know——’

‘She must not be told yet,’ said Paula. . . . ‘Sir William dead!’

‘You think we had better not tell her just yet?’ said De Stancy anxiously. ‘That’s what I want to consult you about, if you—don’t mind my intruding.’

‘Certainly I don’t,’ she said.

They continued the discussion for some time; and it was decided that Charlotte should not be informed of what had happened till the doctor had been consulted, Paula promising to account for her brother’s departure.

De Stancy then prepared to leave for England by the first morning train, and roused the night-porter, which functionary, having packed off Abner Power, was discovered asleep on the sofa of the landlord’s parlour. At half-past five Paula, who in the interim had been pensively sitting with her hand to her chin, quite forgetting that she had meant to go to bed, heard wheels without, and looked from the window. A fly had been brought round, and one of the hotel servants was in the act of putting up a portmanteau with De Stancy’s initials upon it. A minute afterwards the captain came to her door.

‘I thought you had not gone to bed, after all.’

‘I was anxious to see you off,’ said she, ‘since neither of the others is awake; and you wished me not to rouse them.’

‘Quite right, you are very good;’ and lowering his

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voice : ' Paula, it is a sad and solemn time with me.— Will you grant me one word—not on our last sad subject, but on the previous one—before I part with you to go and bury my father ? '

' Certainly,' she said, in gentle accents.

' Then have you thought over my position ? Will you at last have pity upon my loneliness by becoming my wife ? '

Paula sighed deeply ; and said, ' Yes.'

' Your hand upon it.'

She gave him her hand : he held it a few moments, then raised it to his lips, and was gone.

When Mrs. Goodman rose she was informed of Sir William's death, and of his son's departure.

' Then the captain is now Sir William De Stancy ! ' she exclaimed. ' Really, Paula, since you would be Lady De Stancy by marrying him, I almost think——'

' Hush, aunt ! '

' Well ; what are you writing there ? '

' Only entering in my diary that I accepted him this morning for pity's sake, in spite of Uncle Abner. They'll say it was for the title, but knowing it was not I don't care.'

XI

ON the evening of the fourth day after the parting between Paula and De Stancy at Amiens, when it was quite dark in the Markton highway, except in so far as the shades were broken by the faint lights from the adjacent town, a young man knocked softly at the door of Myrtle Villa, and asked if Captain De Stancy had arrived from abroad. He was answered in the affirmative, and in a few moments the captain himself came from an adjoining room.

Seeing that his visitor was Dare, from whom, as will be remembered, he had parted at Carlsruhe in no very satisfied mood, De Stancy did not ask him into the house, but putting on his hat went out with the youth into the public road. Here they conversed as they walked up and down, Dare beginning by alluding to the death of Sir William, the suddenness of which he feared would delay Captain De Stancy's overtures for the hand of Miss Power.

'No,' said De Stancy moodily. 'On the contrary, it has precipitated matters.'

'She has accepted you, captain?'

'We are engaged to be married.'

'Well done! I congratulate you.' The speaker was about to proceed to further triumphant notes on the intelligence, when casting his eye upon the upper

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windows of the neighbouring villa, he appeared to reflect on what was within them, and checking himself, 'When is the funeral to be?'

'To-morrow,' De Stancy replied. 'It would be advisable for you not to come near me during the day.'

'I will not. I will be a mere spectator. The old vault of our ancestors will be opened, I presume, captain?'

'It is opened.'

'I must see it—and ruminate on what we once were: it is a thing I like doing. The ghosts of our dead—— Ah, what was that?'

'I heard nothing.'

'I thought I heard a footstep behind us.'

They stood still; but the road appeared to be quite deserted, and likely to continue so for the remainder of that evening. They walked on again, speaking in somewhat lower tones than before.

'Will the late Sir William's death delay the wedding much?' asked the younger man curiously.

De Stancy languidly answered that he did not see why it should do so. Some little time would of course intervene, but, since there were several reasons for despatch, he should urge Miss Power and her relatives to consent to a virtually private wedding which might take place at a very early date; and he thought there would be a general consent on that point.

'There are indeed reasons for despatch. Your title, Sir William, is a new safeguard over her heart, certainly; but there is many a slip, and you must not lose her now.'

'I don't mean to lose her!' said De Stancy. 'She is too good to be lost. And yet—since she gave her promise I have felt more than once that I would not engage in such a struggle again. It was not a thing of my beginning, though I was easily enough inflamed to follow. But I will not lose her now.—For God's sake,

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keep that secret you have so foolishly pricked on your breast. It fills me with remorse to think what she with her scrupulous notions will feel, should she ever know of you and your history, and your relation to me!’

Dare made no reply till after a silence, when he said, ‘Of course mum’s the word till the wedding is over.’

‘And afterwards—promise that for her sake?’

‘And probably afterwards.’

Sir William De Stancy drew a dejected breath at the tone of the answer. They conversed but a little while longer, the captain hinting to Dare that it was time for them to part; not, however, before he had uttered a hope that the young man would turn over a new leaf and engage in some regular pursuit. Promising to call upon him at his lodgings De Stancy went indoors, and Dare briskly retraced his steps to Markton.

When his footfall had died away, and the door of the house opposite had been closed, another man appeared upon the scene. He came gently out of the hedge opposite Myrtle Villa, which he paused to regard for a moment. But instead of going townward, he turned his back upon the distant sprinkle of lights, and did not check his walk till he reached the lodge of Stancy Castle.

Here he pulled the wooden acorn beside the arch, and when the porter appeared his light revealed the pedestrian’s countenance to be scathed, as by lightning.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Power,’ said the porter with sudden deference as he opened the wicket. ‘But we wasn’t expecting anybody to-night, as there is nobody at home, and the servants on board wages; and that’s why I was so long a-coming.’

‘No matter, no matter,’ said Abner Power. ‘I have returned on sudden business, and have not come to stay longer than to-night. Your mistress is not

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with me. I meant to sleep in Markton, but have changed my mind.'

Mr. Power had brought no luggage with him beyond a small hand-bag, and as soon as a room could be got ready he retired to bed.

The next morning he passed in idly walking about the grounds and observing the progress which had been made in the works—now temporarily suspended. But that inspection was less his object in remaining there than meditation, was abundantly evident. When the bell began to toll from the neighbouring church to announce the burial of Sir William De Stancy, he passed through the castle, and went on foot in the direction indicated by the sound. Reaching the margin of the churchyard he looked over the wall, his presence being masked by bushes and a group of idlers from Markton who stood in front. Soon a funeral procession of simple—almost meagre and threadbare—character arrived, but Power did not join the people who followed the deceased into the church. De Stancy was the chief mourner and only relation present, the other followers of the broken-down old man being an ancient lawyer, a couple of faithful servants, and a bowed villager who had been page to the late Sir William's father—the single living person left in the parish who remembered the De Stancys as people of wealth and influence, and who firmly believed that family would come into its rights ere long, and oust the uncircumcized Philistines who had taken possession of the old lands.

The funeral was over, and the rusty carriages had gone, together with many of the spectators; but Power lingered in the churchyard as if he were looking for some one. At length he entered the church, passing by the cavernous pitfall with descending steps which stood open outside the wall of the De Stancy aisle. Arrived within he scanned the few idlers of antiquarian

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tastes who had remained after the service to inspect the monuments; and beside a recumbent effigy—the effigy in alabaster whose features Paula had wiped with her handkerchief when there with Somerset—he beheld the man it had been his business to find. Abner Power went up and touched this person, who was Dare, on the shoulder.

‘Mr. Power—so it is!’ said the youth. ‘I have not seen you since we met in Carlsruhe.’

‘You shall see all the more of me now to make up for it. Shall we walk round the church?’

‘With all my heart,’ said Dare.

They walked round; and Abner Power began in a sardonic recitative: ‘I am a traveller, and it takes a good deal to astonish me. So I neither swooned nor screamed when I learnt a few hours ago what I had suspected for a week, that you are of the house and lineage of Jacob.’ He flung a nod towards the canopied tombs as he spoke.—‘In other words, that you are of the same breed as the De Stancys.’

Dare cursorily glanced round. Nobody was near enough to hear their words, the nearest persons being two workmen just outside, who were bringing their tools up from the vault preparatively to closing it.

Having observed this Dare replied, ‘I, too, am a traveller; and neither do I swoon nor scream at what you say. But I assure you that if you busy yourself about me, you may truly be said to busy yourself about nothing.’

‘Well, that’s a matter of opinion. Now, there’s no scarlet left in my face to blush for men’s follies; but as an alliance is afoot between my niece and the present Sir William, this must be looked into.’

Dare reflectively said ‘O,’ as he observed through the window one of the workmen bring up a candle from the vault and extinguish it with his fingers.

‘The marriage is desirable, and your relationship

in itself is of no consequence,' continued the elder; 'but just look at this. You have forced on the marriage by unscrupulous means, your object being only too clearly to live out of the proceeds of that marriage.'

'Mr. Power, you mock me, because I labour under the misfortune of having an illegitimate father to provide for. I really deserve commiseration.'

'You might deserve it if that were all. But it looks bad for my niece's happiness as Lady De Stancy, that she and her husband are to be perpetually haunted by a young *chevalier d'industrie*, who can forge a telegram on occasion, and libel an innocent man by an ingenious device in photography. It looks so bad, in short, that, advantageous as a title and old family name would be to her and her children, I won't let my brother's daughter run the risk of having them at the expense of being in the grip of a man like you. There are other suitors in the world, and other titles: and she is a beautiful woman, who can well afford to be fastidious. I shall let her know at once of these things, and break off the business—unless you do *one thing*.'

A workman brought up another candle from the vault, and prepared to let down the slab. 'Well, Mr. Power, and what is that one thing?'

'Go to Peru as my agent in a business I have just undertaken there.'

'And settle there?'

'Of course. I am soon going over myself, and will bring you anything you require.'

'How long will you give me to consider?' said Dare.

Power looked at his watch. 'One, two, three, four hours,' he said. 'I leave Markton by the seven o'clock train this evening.'

'And if I meet your proposal with a negative?'

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‘I shall go at once to my niece and tell her the whole circumstances—tell her that, by marrying Sir William, she allies herself with an unhappy gentleman in the power of a criminal son who makes his life a burden to him by perpetual demands upon his purse; who will increase those demands with his accession to wealth, threaten to degrade her by exposing her husband’s antecedents if she opposes his extortions, and who will make her miserable by letting her know that her old lover was shamefully victimized by a youth she is bound to screen out of respect to her husband’s feelings. Now a man does not care to let his own flesh and blood incur the danger of such anguish as that, and I shall do what I say to prevent it. Knowing what a lukewarm sentiment hers is for Sir William at best, I shall not have much difficulty.’

‘Well, I don’t feel inclined to go to Peru.’

‘Neither do I want to break off the match, though I am ready to do it. But you care about your personal freedom, and you might be made to wear the broad arrow for your tricks on Somerset.’

‘Mr. Power, I see you are a hard man.’

‘I am a hard man. You will find me one. Well, will you go to Peru? Or I don’t mind Australia or California as alternatives. As long as you choose to remain in either of those wealth-producing places, so long will Cunningham Haze go uninformed.’

‘Mr. Power, I am overcome. Will you allow me to sit down? Suppose we go into the vestry. It is more comfortable.’

They entered the vestry, and seated themselves in two chairs, one at each end of the table.

‘In the meantime,’ continued Dare, ‘to lend a little romance to stern realities, I’ll tell you a singular dream I had just before you returned to England.’ Power looked contemptuous, but Dare went on: ‘I dreamt that once upon a time there were two brothers, born of

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a Nonconformist family, one of whom became a railway-contractor, and the other a mechanical engineer.'

'A mechanical engineer—good,' said Power, beginning to attend.

'When the first went abroad in his profession, and became engaged on continental railways, the second, a younger man, looking round for a start, also betook himself to the continent. But though ingenious and scientific, he had not the business capacity of the elder, whose rebukes led to a sharp quarrel between them; and they parted in bitter estrangement—never to meet again as it turned out, owing to the dogged obstinacy and self-will of the younger man. He, after this, seemed to lose his moral ballast altogether, and after some eccentric doings he was reduced to a state of poverty, and took lodgings in a court in a back street of a town we will call Geneva, considerably in doubt as to what steps he should take to keep body and soul together.'

Abner Power was shooting a narrow ray of eyesight at Dare from the corner of his nearly closed lids. 'Your dream is so interesting,' he said, with a hard smile, 'that I could listen to it all day.'

'Excellent!' said Dare, and went on: 'Now it so happened that the house opposite to the one taken by the mechanician was peculiar. It was a tall narrow building, wholly unornamented, the walls covered with a layer of white plaster cracked and soiled by time. I seem to see that house now! Six stone steps led up to the door, with a rusty iron railing on each side, and under these steps were others which went down to a cellar—in my dream of course.'

'Of course—in your dream,' said Power, nodding comprehensively.

'Sitting lonely and apathetic without a light, at his own chamber-window at night time, our mechanician frequently observed dark figures descending these steps,

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and ultimately discovered that the house was the meeting-place of a fraternity of political philosophers, whose object was the extermination of tyrants and despots, and the overthrow of established religions. The discovery was startling enough, but our hero was not easily startled. He kept their secret and lived on as before. At last the mechanician and his affairs became known to the society, as the affairs of the society had become known to the mechanician, and, instead of shooting him as one who knew too much for their safety, they were struck with his faculty for silence, and thought they might be able to make use of him.'

'To be sure,' said Abner Power.

'Next, like friend Bunyan, I saw in my dream that denunciation was the breath of life to this society. At an earlier date in its history, objectionable persons in power had been from time to time murdered, and curiously enough numbered; that is, upon the body of each was set a mark or seal, announcing that he was one of a series. But at this time the question before the society related to the substitution for the dagger, which was vetoed as obsolete, of some explosive machine that would be both more effectual and less difficult to manage; and in short, a large reward was offered to our needy Englishman if he would put their ideas of such a machine into shape.'

Abner Power nodded again, his complexion being peculiar—which might partly have been accounted for by the reflection of window-light from the green-baize table-cloth.

'He agreed, though no politician whatever himself, to exercise his wits on their account, and brought his machine to such a pitch of perfection, that it was the identical one used in the memorable attempt—' (Dare whispered the remainder of the sentence in tones so low that not a mouse in the corner could have heard.) 'Well, the inventor of that explosive has naturally been

wanted ever since by all the heads of police in Europe. But the most curious—or perhaps the most natural—part of my story is, that our hero, after the catastrophe, grew disgusted with himself and his comrades, acquired, in a fit of revulsion, quite a conservative taste in politics, which was strengthened greatly by the news he indirectly received of the great wealth and respectability of his brother, who had had no communion with him for years, and supposed him dead. He abjured his employers and resolved to abandon them; but before coming to England he decided to destroy all trace of his combustible inventions by dropping them into the neighbouring lake at night from a boat. You feel the room close, Mr. Power?’

‘No, I suffer from attacks of perspiration whenever I sit in a consecrated edifice—that’s all. Pray go on.’

‘In carrying out this project, an explosion occurred, just as he was throwing the stock overboard: it blew up into his face, wounding him severely, and nearly depriving him of sight. The boat was upset, but he swam ashore in the darkness, and remained hidden till he recovered, though the scars produced by the burns had been set on him for ever. This accident, which was such a misfortune to him as a man, was an advantage to him as a conspirators’ engineer retiring from practice, and afforded him a disguise both from his own brotherhood and from the police, which he has considered impenetrable, but which is getting seen through by one or two keen eyes as time goes on. Instead of coming to England just then, he went to Peru, connected himself with the guano trade, I believe, and after his brother’s death revisited England, his old life obliterated as far as practicable by his new principles. He is known only as a great traveller to his surviving relatives, though he seldom says where he has travelled. Unluckily for himself, he is *wanted* by certain European governments as badly as ever.’

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Dare raised his eyes as he concluded his narration. As has been remarked, he was sitting at one end of the vestry-table, Power at the other, the green cloth stretching between them. On the edge of the table adjoining Mr. Power a shining nozzle of metal was quietly resting, like a dog's nose. It was directed point-blank at the young man.

Dare started. 'Ah—a revolver?' he said.

Mr. Power nodded placidly, his hand still grasping the pistol behind the edge of the table. 'As a traveller I always carry one of 'em,' he returned; 'and for the last five minutes I have been closely considering whether your numerous brains are worth blowing out or no. The vault yonder has suggested itself as convenient and snug for one of the same family; but the mental problem that stays my hand is, how am I to despatch and bury you there without the workmen seeing?'

'Tis a strange problem, certainly,' replied Dare, 'and one on which I fear I could not give disinterested advice. Moreover, while you, as a traveller, always carry a weapon of defence, as a traveller so do I. And for the last three-quarters of an hour I have been thinking concerning you, an intensified form of what you have been thinking of me, but without any concern as to your interment. See here for a proof of it.' And a second steel nose rested on the edge of the table opposite to the first, steadied by Dare's right hand.

They remained for some time motionless, the tick of the tower clock distinctly audible.

Mr. Power spoke first.

'Well, 'twould be a pity to make a mess here under such dubious circumstances. Mr. Dare, I perceive that a mean vagabond can be as sharp as a political regenerator. I cry quits, if you care to do the same?'

Dare assented, and the pistols were put away.

'Then we do nothing at all, either side; but let the

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course of true love run on to marriage—that's the understanding, I think?' said Dare as he rose.

'It is,' said Power; and turning on his heel, he left the vestry.

Dare retired to the church and thence to the outside, where he idled away a few minutes in looking at the workmen, who were now lowering into its place a large stone slab, bearing the words 'DE STANCY,' which covered the entrance to the vault. When the footway of the churchyard was restored to its normal condition Dare pursued his way to Markton.

Abner Power walked back to the castle at a slow and equal pace, as though he carried an over-brimming vessel on his head. He silently let himself in, entered the long gallery, and sat down. The length of time that he sat there was so remarkable as to raise that interval of inanition to the rank of a feat.

Power's eyes glanced through one of the window-casements: from a hole without he saw the head of a tomtit protruding. He listlessly watched the bird during the successive epochs of his thought, till night came, without any perceptible change occurring in him. Such fixity would have meant nothing else than sudden death in any other man, but in Mr. Power it merely signified that he was engaged in ruminations which necessitated a more extensive survey than usual. At last, at half-past eight, after having sat for five hours with his eyes on the residence of the tomtits, to whom night had brought cessation of thought, if not to him who had observed them, he rose amid the shades of the furniture, and rang the bell. There were only a servant or two in the castle, one of whom presently came with a light in her hand and a startled look upon her face, which was not reduced when she recognized him; for in the opinion of that household there was something ghoul-like in Mr. Power, which made him no desirable guest.

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He ate a late meal, and retired to bed, where he seemed to sleep not unsoundly. The next morning he received a letter which afforded him infinite satisfaction and gave his stagnant impulses a new momentum. He entered the library, and amid objects swathed in brown holland sat down and wrote a note to his niece at Amiens. Therein he stated that, finding that the Anglo-South-American house with which he had recently connected himself required his presence in Peru, it obliged him to leave without waiting for her return. He felt the less uneasy at going, since he had learnt that Captain De Stancy would return at once to Amiens to his sick sister, and see them safely home when she improved. He afterwards left the castle, disappearing towards a railway station some miles above Markton, the road to which lay across an unfrequented down.

XII

IT was a fine afternoon of late summer, nearly three months subsequent to the death of Sir William De Stancy and Paula's engagement to marry his successor in the title. George Somerset had started on a professional journey that took him through the charming district which lay around Stancy Castle. Having resigned his appointment as architect to that important structure—a resignation which had been accepted by Paula through her solicitor—he had bidden farewell to the locality after putting matters in such order that his successor, whoever he might be, should have no difficulty in obtaining the particulars necessary to the completion of the work in hand. Hardly to his surprise this successor was Havill.

Somerset's resignation had been tendered in no hasty mood. On returning to England, and in due course to the castle, everything bore in upon his mind the exceeding sorrowfulness—he would not say humiliation—of continuing to act in his former capacity for a woman who, from seeming more than a dear friend, had become less than an acquaintance.

So he resigned ; but now, as the train drew on into that once beloved tract of country, the images which met his eye threw him back in point of emotion to very near where he had been before making himself a

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stranger here. The train entered the cutting on whose brink he had walked when the carriage containing Paula and her friends surprised him the previous summer. He looked out of the window: they were passing the well-known curve that led up to the tunnel constructed by her father, into which he had gone when the train came by and Paula had been alarmed for his life. There was the path they had both climbed afterwards, involuntarily seizing each other's hand; the bushes, the grass, the flowers, everything just the same:

‘———Here was the pleasant place,
And nothing wanting was, save She, alas!’

When they came out of the tunnel at the other end he caught a glimpse of the distant castle-keep, and the well-remembered walls beneath it. The experience so far transcended the intensity of what is called mournful pleasure as to make him wonder how he could have miscalculated himself to the extent of supposing that he might pass the spot with controllable emotion.

On entering Markton station he withdrew into a remote corner of the carriage, and closed his eyes with a resolve not to open them till the embittering scenes should be passed by. He had not long to wait for this event. When again in motion his eye fell upon the skirt of a lady's dress opposite, the owner of which had entered and seated herself so softly as not to attract his attention.

‘Ah indeed!’ he exclaimed as he looked up to her face. ‘I had not a notion that it was you!’ He went over and shook hands with Charlotte De Stancy.

‘I am not going far,’ she said; ‘only to the next station. We often run down in summer time. Are you going far?’

‘I am going to a building further on; thence to Normandy by way of Cherbourg, to finish out my holiday.’

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Miss De Stancy thought that would be very nice.

‘Well, I hope so. But I fear it won’t.’

After saying that Somerset asked himself why he should mince matters with so genuine and sympathetic a girl as Charlotte De Stancy? She could tell him particulars which he burned to know. He might never again have an opportunity of knowing them, since she and he would probably not meet for years to come, if at all.

‘Have the castle works progressed pretty rapidly under the new architect?’ he accordingly asked.

‘Yes,’ said Charlotte in her haste—then adding that she was not quite sure if they had progressed so rapidly as before; blushing correcting herself at this point and that, in the tinkering manner of a nervous organization aiming at nicety where it was not required.

‘Well, I should have liked to carry out the undertaking to its end,’ said Somerset. ‘But I felt I could not consistently do so. Miss Power—’ (here a lump came into Somerset’s throat—so responsive was he yet to her image)—‘seemed to have lost confidence in me, and—it was best that the connection should be severed.’

There was a long pause. ‘She was very sorry about it,’ said Charlotte gently.

‘What made her alter so?—I never can think!’

Charlotte waited again as if to accumulate the necessary force for honest speaking at the expense of pleasantness. ‘It was the telegram that began it of course,’ she answered.

‘Telegram?’

She looked up at him in quite a frightened way—little as there was to be frightened at in a quiet fellow like him in this sad time of his life—and said, ‘Yes: some telegram—I think—when you were in trouble? Forgive my alluding to it; but you asked me the question.’

Somerset began reflecting on what messages he had

sent Paula, troublous or otherwise. All he had sent had been sent from the castle, and were as gentle and mellifluous as sentences well could be which had neither articles nor pronouns. 'I don't understand,' he said. 'Will you explain a little more—as plainly as you like—without minding my feelings?'

'A telegram from Nice, I think?'

'I never sent one.'

'O! The one I meant was about money.'

Somerset shook his head. 'No,' he murmured, with the composure of a man who, knowing he had done nothing of the sort himself, was blinded by his own honesty to the possibility that another might have done it for him. 'That must be some other affair with which I had nothing to do. O no, it was nothing like that; the reason for her change of manner was quite different!'

So timid was Charlotte in Somerset's presence, that her timidity at this juncture amounted to blameworthiness. The distressing scene which must have followed a clearing up there and then of any possible misunderstanding, terrified her imagination; and quite confounded by contradictions that she could not reconcile, she held her tongue, and nervously looked out of the window.

'I have heard that Miss Power is soon to be married,' continued Somerset.

'Yes,' Charlotte murmured. 'It is sooner than it ought to be by rights, considering how recently my dear father died; but there are reasons in connection with my brother's position against putting it off: and it is to be absolutely simple and private.'

There was another interval. 'May I ask when it is to be?' he said.

'Almost at once—this week.'

Somerset started back as if some stone had hit his face.

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Still there was nothing wonderful in such promptitude: engagements broken in upon by the death of a near relative of one of the parties had been often carried out in a subdued form with no longer delay.

Charlotte's station was now at hand. She bade him farewell; and he rattled on to the building he had come to inspect, and next to Budmouth, whence he intended to cross the Channel by steamboat that night.

He hardly knew how the evening passed away. He had taken up his quarters at an inn near the quay, and as the night drew on he stood gazing from the coffee-room window at the steamer outside, which nearly thrust its spars through the bedroom casements, and at the goods that were being tumbled on board as only shippers can tumble them. All the goods were laden, a lamp was put on each side the gangway, the engines broke into a crackling roar, and people began to enter. They were only waiting for the last train: then they would be off. Still Somerset did not move; he was thinking of that curious half-told story of Charlotte's, about a telegram to Paula for money from Nice. Not once till within the last half-hour had it recurred to his mind that he had met Dare both at Nice and at Monte Carlo; that at the latter place he had been absolutely out of money and wished to borrow, showing considerable sinister feeling when Somerset declined to lend: that on one or two previous occasions he had reasons for doubting Dare's probity; and that in spite of the young man's impoverishment at Monte Carlo he had, a few days later, beheld him in shining raiment at Carlsruhe. Somerset, though misty in his conjectures, was seized with a growing conviction that there was something in Miss De Stancy's allusion to the telegram which ought to be explained.

He felt an insurmountable objection to cross the water that night, or till he had been able to see Charlotte again, and learn more of her meaning. He

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countermanded the order to put his luggage on board, watched the steamer out of the harbour, and went to bed. He might as well have gone to battle, for any rest that he got. On rising the next morning he felt rather blank, though none the less convinced that a matter required investigation. He left Budmouth by a morning train, and about eleven o'clock found himself in Markton.

The momentum of a practical inquiry took him through that ancient borough without leaving him much leisure for those reveries which had yesterday lent an unutterable sadness to every object there. It was just before noon that he started for the castle, intending to arrive at a time of the morning when, as he knew from experience, he could speak to Charlotte without difficulty. The rising ground soon revealed the old towers to him, and, jutting out behind them, the scaffoldings for the new wing.

While halting here on the knoll in some doubt about his movements he beheld a man coming along the road, and was soon confronted by his former competitor, Havill. The first instinct of each was to pass with a nod, but a second instinct for intercourse was sufficient to bring them to a halt. After a few superficial words had been spoken Somerset said, 'You have succeeded me.'

'I have,' said Havill; 'but little to my advantage. I have just heard that my commission is to extend no further than roofing in the wing that you began, and had I known that before, I would have seen the castle fall flat as Jericho before I would have accepted the superintendence. But I know who I have to thank for that—De Stancy.'

Somerset still looked towards the distant battlements. On the scaffolding, among the white-jacketed workmen, he could discern one figure in a dark suit.

'You have a clerk of the works, I see,' he observed.

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‘Nominally I have, but practically I haven’t.’

‘Then why do you keep him?’

‘I can’t help myself. He is Mr. Dare; and having been recommended by a higher power than I, there he must stay in spite of me.’

‘Who recommended him?’

‘The same—De Stancy.’

‘It is very odd,’ murmured Somerset, ‘but that young man is the object of my visit.’

‘You had better leave him alone,’ said Havill drily.

Somerset asked why.

‘Since I call no man master over that way I will inform you.’ Havill then related in splenetic tones, to which Somerset did not care to listen till the story began to advance itself, how he had passed the night with Dare at the inn, and the incidents of that night, relating how he had seen some letters on the young man’s breast which long had puzzled him. ‘They were an E, a T, an N, and a C. I thought over them long, till it eventually occurred to me that the word when filled out was “De Stancy,” and that kinship explains the offensive and defensive alliance between them.’

‘But, good heavens, man!’ said Somerset, more and more disturbed. ‘Does she know of it?’

‘You may depend she does not yet; but she will soon enough. Hark—there it is!’ The notes of the castle clock were heard striking noon. ‘Then it is all over.’

‘What?—not their marriage!’

‘Yes. Didn’t you know it was the wedding day? They were to be at the church at half-past eleven. I should have waited to see her go, but it was no sight to hinder business for, as she was only going to drive over in her brougham with Miss De Stancy.’

‘My errand has failed!’ said Somerset, turning on his heel. ‘I’ll walk back to the town with you.’

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However he did not walk far with Havill; society was too much at that moment. As soon as opportunity offered he branched from the road by a path, and avoiding the town went by railway to Budmouth, whence he resumed, by the night steamer, his journey to Normandy

XIII

TO return to Charlotte De Stancy. When the train had borne Somerset from her side, and she had regained her self-possession, she became conscious of the true proportions of the fact he had asserted. And, further, if the telegram had not been his, why should the photographic distortion be trusted as a phase of his existence? But after a while it seemed so improbable to her that God's sun should bear false witness, that instead of doubting both evidences she was inclined to readmit the first. Still, upon the whole, she could not question for long the honesty of Somerset's denial: and if that message had indeed been sent by him, it must have been done while he was in another such an unhappy state as that exemplified by the portrait. The supposition reconciled all differences; and yet she could not but fight against it with all the strength of a generous affection.

All the afternoon her poor little head was busy on this perturbing question, till she inquired of herself whether after all it might not be possible for photographs to represent people as they had never been. Before rejecting the hypothesis she determined to have the word of a professor on the point, which would be better than all her surmises. Returning to Markton early, she told the coachman whom Paula had sent, to drive her to the

shop of Mr. Ray, an obscure photographic artist in that town, instead of straight home.

Ray's establishment consisted of two divisions, the respectable and the shabby. If, on entering the door, the visitor turned to the left, he found himself in a magazine of old clothes, old furniture, china, umbrellas, guns, fishing-rods, dirty fiddles, and split flutes. Entering the right-hand room, which had originally been that of an independent house, he was in an ordinary photographer's and print-collector's depository, to which a certain artistic solidity was imparted by a few oil paintings in the background. Charlotte made for the latter department, and when she was inside Mr. Ray appeared in person from the lumber-shop adjoining, which, despite its manginess, contributed by far the greater share to his income.

Charlotte put her question simply enough. The man did not answer her directly, but soon found that she meant no harm to him. He told her that such misrepresentations were quite possible, and that they embodied a form of humour which was getting more and more into vogue among certain facetious persons of society.

Charlotte was coming away when she asked, as on second thoughts, if he had any specimens of such work to show her.

'None of my own preparation,' said Mr. Ray, with unimpeachable probity of tone. 'I consider them libellous myself. Still, I have one or two samples by me, which I keep merely as curiosities.—There's one,' he said, throwing out a portrait card from a drawer. 'That represents the German Emperor in a violent passion: this one shows the Prime Minister out of his mind; this the Pope of Rome the worse for liquor.'

She inquired if he had any local specimens.

'Yes,' he said, 'but I prefer not to exhibit them unless you really ask for a particular one that you mean to buy.'

‘I don’t want any.’

‘O, I beg pardon, miss. Well, I shouldn’t myself have known such things were produced, if there had not been a young man here at one time who was very ingenious in these matters—a Mr. Dare. He was quite a gent, and only did it as an amusement, and not for the sake of getting a living.’

Charlotte had no wish to hear more. On her way home she burst into tears: the entanglement was altogether too much for her to tear asunder, even had not her own instincts been urging her two ways, as they were.

To immediately right Somerset’s wrong was her impetuous desire as an honest woman who loved him; but such rectification would be the jeopardizing of all else that gratified her—the marriage of her brother with her dearest friend—now on the very point of accomplishment. It was a marriage which seemed to promise happiness, or at least comfort, if the old flutter that had transiently disturbed Paula’s bosom could be kept from reviving, to which end it became imperative to hide from her the discovery of injustice to Somerset. It involved the advantage of leaving Somerset free; and though her own tender interest in him had been too well schooled by habitual self-denial to run ahead on vain personal hopes, there was nothing more than human in her feeling pleasure in prolonging Somerset’s singleness. Paula might even be allowed to discover his wrongs when her marriage had put him out of her power. But to let her discover his ill-treatment now might upset the impending union of the families, and wring her own heart with the sight of Somerset married in her brother’s place.

Why Dare, or any other person, should have set himself to advance her brother’s cause by such unscrupulous blackening of Somerset’s character was more than her sagacity could fathom. Her brother was, as far as

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she could see, the only man who could directly profit by the machination, and was therefore the natural one to suspect of having set it going. But she would not be so disloyal as to entertain the thought long; and who or what had instigated Dare, who was undoubtedly the proximate cause of the mischief, remained to her an inscrutable mystery.

The contention of interests and desires with honour in her heart shook Charlotte all that night; but good principle prevailed. The wedding was to be solemnized the very next morning, though for before-mentioned reasons this was hardly known outside the two houses interested; and there were no visible preparations either at villa or castle. De Stancy and his groomsman—a brother officer—slept at the former residence.

De Stancy was a sorry specimen of a bridegroom when he met his sister in the morning. Thick-coming fancies, for which there was more than good reason, had disturbed him only too successfully, and he was as full of apprehension as one who has a league with Mephistopheles. Charlotte told him nothing of what made her likewise so wan and anxious, but drove off to the castle, as had been planned, about nine o'clock, leaving her brother and his friend at the breakfast-table.

That clearing Somerset's reputation from the stain which had been thrown on it would cause a sufficient reaction in Paula's mind to dislocate present arrangements she did not so seriously anticipate, now that morning had a little calmed her. Since the rupture with her former architect Paula had sedulously kept her own counsel, but Charlotte assumed from the ease with which she seemed to do it that her feelings towards him had never been inconveniently warm; and she hoped that Paula would learn of Somerset's purity with merely the generous pleasure of a friend, coupled with a friend's indignation against his traducer.

Still, the possibility existed of stronger emotions, and

it was only too evident to poor Charlotte that, knowing this, she had still less excuse for delaying the intelligence till the strongest emotion would be purposeless.

On approaching the castle the first object that caught her eye was Dare, standing beside Havill on the scaffolding of the new wing. He was looking down upon the drive and court, as if in anticipation of the event. His contiguity flurried her, and instead of going straight to Paula she sought out Mrs. Goodman.

‘You are come early; that’s right!’ said the latter. ‘You might as well have slept here last night. We have only Mr. Wardlaw, the London lawyer you have heard of, in the house. Your brother’s solicitor was here yesterday; but he returned to Markton for the night. We miss Mr. Power so much—it is so unfortunate that he should have been obliged to go abroad, and leave us unprotected women with so much responsibility.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Charlotte quickly, having a shy distaste for the details of what troubled her so much in the gross.

‘Paula has inquired for you.’

‘What is she doing?’

‘She is in her room: she has not begun to dress yet. Will you go to her?’

Charlotte assented. ‘I have to tell her something,’ she said, ‘which will make no difference, but which I should like her to know this morning—at once. I have discovered that we have been entirely mistaken about Mr. Somerset.’ She nerved herself to relate succinctly what had come to her knowledge the day before.

Mrs. Goodman was much impressed. She had never clearly heard before what circumstances had attended the resignation of Paula’s architect. ‘We had better not tell her till the wedding is over,’ she presently said; ‘it would only disturb her, and do no good.’

‘But will it be right?’ asked Miss De Stancy.

‘Yes, it will be right if we tell her afterwards. O

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yes—it must be right,’ she repeated in a tone which showed that her opinion was unstable enough to require a little fortification by the voice. ‘She loves your brother; she must, since she is going to marry him; and it can make little difference whether we rehabilitate the character of a friend now, or some few hours hence. The author of those wicked tricks on Mr. Somerset ought not to go a moment unpunished.’

‘That’s what I think; and what right have we to hold our tongues even for a few hours?’

Charlotte found that by telling Mrs. Goodman she had simply made two irresolute people out of one, and, as Paula was now inquiring for her, she went upstairs without having come to any decision.

XIV

PAULA was in her boudoir, writing down some notes previous to beginning her wedding toilet, which was designed to harmonize with the simplicity that characterized the other arrangements. She owned that it was depriving the neighbourhood of a pageant which it had a right to expect of her; but the circumstance was inexorable.

Mrs. Goodman entered Paula's room immediately behind Charlotte. Perhaps the only difference between the Paula of to-day and the Paula of last year was an accession of thoughtfulness, natural to the circumstances in any case, and more particularly when, as now, the bride's isolation made self-dependence a necessity. She was sitting in a light dressing-gown, and her face, which was rather pale, flushed at the entrance of Charlotte and her aunt.

'I knew you were come,' she said, when Charlotte stooped and kissed her. 'I heard you. I have done nothing this morning, and feel dreadfully unsettled. Is all well?'

The question was put without thought, but its aptness seemed almost to imply an intuitive knowledge of their previous conversation. 'Yes,' said Charlotte tardily.

'Well, now, Clémentine shall dress you, and I can

do with Milly,' continued Paula. 'Come along.—Well, aunt—what's the matter?—and you, Charlotte? You look harassed.'

'I have not slept well,' said Charlotte.

'And have not you slept well either, aunt? You said nothing about it at breakfast.'

'O, it is nothing,' said Mrs. Goodman quickly. 'I have been disturbed by learning of somebody's villainy. I am going to tell you all some time to-day, but it is not important enough to disturb you with now.'

'No mystery!' argued Paula. 'Come! it is not fair.'

'I don't think it is quite fair,' said Miss De Stancy, looking from one to the other in some distress. 'Mrs. Goodman—I must tell her! Paula, Mr. Som——'

'He's dead!' cried Paula, sinking into a chair and turning as pale as marble. 'Is he dead?—tell me!' she whispered.

'No, no—he's not dead—he is very well, and gone to Normandy for a holiday!'

'O—I am glad to hear it,' answered Paula, with a sudden cool mannerliness.

'He has been misrepresented,' said Mrs. Goodman. 'That's all.'

'Well?' said Paula, with her eyes bent on the floor.

'I have been feeling that I ought to tell you clearly, dear Paula,' declared her friend. 'It is absolutely false about his telegraphing to you for money—it is absolutely false that his character is such as that dreadful picture represented it. There—that's the substance of it, and I can tell you particulars at any time.'

But Paula would not be told at any time. A dreadful sorrow sat in her face; she insisted upon learning everything about the matter there and then, and there was no withstanding her.

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When it was all explained she said in a low tone: 'It is that pernicious, evil man Dare—yet why is it he?—what can he have meant by it! Justice before generosity, even on one's wedding-day. Before I become any man's wife this morning I'll see that wretch in jail! The affair must be sifted. . . . O, it was a wicked thing to serve anybody so!—I'll send for Cunningham Haze this moment—the culprit is even now on the premises, I believe—acting as clerk of the works!' The usually well-balanced Paula was excited, and scarcely knowing what she did went to the bell-pull.

'Don't act hastily, Paula,' said her aunt. 'Had you not better consult Sir William? He will act for you in this.'

'Yes.—He is coming round in a few minutes,' said Charlotte, jumping at this happy thought of Mrs. Goodman's.

'He's going to run across to see how you are getting on. He will be here by ten.'

'Yes—he promised last night.'

She had scarcely done speaking when the prancing of a horse was heard in the ward below, and in a few minutes a servant announced Sir William De Stancy.

De Stancy entered saying, 'I have ridden across for ten minutes, as I said I would do, to know if everything is easy and straightforward for you. There will be time enough for me to get back and prepare if I start shortly. Well?'

'I am ruffled,' said Paula, allowing him to take her hand.

'What is it?' said her betrothed.

As Paula did not immediately answer Mrs. Goodman beckoned to Charlotte, and they left the room together.

'A man has to be given in charge, or a boy, or a demon,' she replied. 'I was going to do it, but you can do it better than I. He will run away if we don't mind.'

‘But, my dear Paula, who is it?—what has he done?’

‘It is Dare—that young man you see out there against the sky.’ She looked from the window sideways towards the new wing, on the roof of which Dare was walking prominently about, after having assisted two of the workmen in putting a red streamer on the tallest scaffold-pole. ‘You must send instantly for Mr. Cunningham Haze!’

‘My dearest Paula,’ repeated De Stancy faintly, his complexion changing to that of a man who had died.

‘Please send for Mr. Haze at once,’ returned Paula, with graceful firmness. ‘I said I would be just to a wronged man before I was generous to you—and I will. That lad Dare—to take a practical view of it—has attempted to defraud me of one hundred pounds sterling, and he shall suffer. I won’t tell you what he has done besides, for though it is worse, it is less tangible. When he is handcuffed and sent off to jail I’ll proceed with my dressing. Will you ring the bell?’

‘Had you not better consider?’ began De Stancy.

‘Consider!’ said Paula, with indignation. ‘I have considered. Will you kindly ring, Sir William, and get Thomas to ride at once to Mr. Haze? Or must I rise from this chair and do it myself?’

‘You are very hasty and abrupt this morning, I think,’ he faltered.

Paula rose determinedly from the chair.

‘Since you won’t do it, I must,’ she said.

‘No, dearest!—Let me beg you not to!’

‘Sir William De Stancy!’

She moved towards the bell-pull; but he stepped before and intercepted her.

‘You must not ring the bell for that purpose,’ he said with husky deliberateness, looking into the depths of her face.

‘It wants two hours to the time when you might

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have a right to express such a command as that,' she said haughtily.

'I certainly have not the honour to be your husband yet,' he sadly replied, 'but surely you can listen? There exist reasons against giving this boy in charge which I could easily get you to admit by explanation; but I would rather, without explanation, have you take my word, when I say that by doing so you are striking a blow against both yourself and me.'

Paula, however, had rung the bell.

'You are jealous of somebody or something perhaps!' she said, in tones which showed how fatally all this was telling against the intention of that day. 'I will not be a party to baseness, if it is to save all my fortune!'

The bell was answered quickly. But De Stancy, though plainly in great misery, did not give up his point. Meeting the servant at the door before he could enter the room he said. 'It is nothing; you can go again.'

Paula looked at the unhappy baronet in amazement; then turning to the servant, who stood with the door in his hand, said, 'Tell Thomas to saddle the chestnut, and——'

'It's all a mistake,' insisted De Stancy. 'Leave the room, James!'

James looked at his mistress.

'Yes, James, leave the room,' she calmly said, sitting down. 'Now what have you to say?' she asked, when they were again alone. 'Why must I not issue orders in my own house? Who is this young criminal, that you value his interests higher than my honour? I have delayed for one moment sending my messenger to the chief constable to hear your explanation—only for that.'

'You will still persevere?'

'Certainly. Who is he?'

'Paula . . . he is my son.'

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She remained still as death while one might count ten; then turned her back upon him. 'I think you had better go away,' she whispered. 'You need not come again.'

He did not move. 'Paula—do you indeed mean this?' he asked.

'I do.'

De Stancy walked a few paces, then said in a low voice: 'Miss Power, I knew—I guessed just now, as soon as it began—that we were going to split on this rock. Well—let it be—it cannot be helped; destiny is supreme. The boy was to be my ruin; he is my ruin, and rightly. But before I go grant me one request. Do not prosecute him. Believe me, I will do everything I can to get him out of your way. He shall annoy you no more. . . . Do you promise?'

'I do,' she said. 'Now please leave me.'

'Once more—am I to understand that no marriage is to take place to-day between you and me?'

'You are.'

Sir William De Stancy left the room. It was noticeable throughout the interview that his manner had not been the manner of a man altogether taken by surprise. During the few preceding days his mood had been that of the gambler seasoned in ill-luck, who adopts pessimist surmises as a safe background to his most sanguine hopes.

She remained alone for some time. Then she rang, and requested that Mr. Wardlaw, her father's solicitor and friend, would come up to her. A messenger was despatched, not to Mr. Cunningham Haze, but to the parson of the parish, who in his turn sent to the clerk and clerk's wife, then busy in the church. On receipt of the intelligence the two latter functionaries proceeded to roll up the carpet which had been laid from the door to the gate, put away the kneeling-cushions, locked the doors, and went off to inquire the reason of so

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strange a countermand. It was soon proclaimed in Markton that the marriage had been postponed for a fortnight in consequence of the bride's sudden indisposition: and less public emotion was felt than the case might have drawn forth, from the ignorance of the majority of the populace that a wedding had been going to take place at all.

Meanwhile Miss De Stancy had been closeted with Paula for more than an hour. It was a difficult meeting, and a severe test to any friendship but that of the most sterling sort. In the turmoil of her distraction Charlotte had the consolation of knowing that if her act of justice to Somerset at such a moment were the act of a simpleton, it was the only course open to honesty. But Paula's cheerful serenity in some measure laid her own troubles to rest, till they were reawakened by a rumour—which got wind some weeks later, and quite drowned all other surprises—of the true relation between the vanished clerk of works, Mr. Dare, and the fallen family of De Stancy.

BOOK THE SIXTH

PAULA

BOOK THE SIXTH

PAULA

I

I HAVE decided that I cannot see Sir William again : I shall go away,' said Paula on the evening of the next day, as she lay on her bed in a flushed and highly-strung condition, though a person who had heard her words without seeing her face would have assumed perfect equanimity to be the mood which expressed itself with such quietness. This was the case with her aunt, who was looking out of the window at some idlers from Markton walking round the castle with their eyes bent upon its windows, and she made no haste to reply.

'Those people have come to see me, as they have a right to do when a person acts so strangely,' Paula continued. 'And hence I am better away.'

'Where do you think to go to?'

Paula replied in the tone of one who was actuated entirely by practical considerations: 'Out of England certainly. And as Normandy lies nearest, I think I shall go there. It is a very nice country to ramble in.'

'Yes, it is a very nice country to ramble in,' echoed her aunt, in moderate tones. 'When do you intend to start?'

‘I should like to cross to-night. You must go with me, aunt; will you not?’

Mrs. Goodman expostulated against such suddenness. ‘It will redouble the rumours that are afloat, if, after being supposed ill, you are seen going off by railway perfectly well.’

‘That’s a contingency which I am quite willing to run the risk of. Well, it would be rather sudden, as you say, to go to-night. But we’ll go to-morrow night at latest.’ Under the influence of the decision she bounded up like an elastic ball and went to the glass, which showed a light in her eye that had not been there before this resolution to travel in Normandy had been taken.

The evening and the next morning were passed in writing a final and kindly note of dismissal to Sir William De Stancy, in making arrangements for the journey, and in commissioning Havill to take advantage of their absence by emptying certain rooms of their furniture, and repairing their dilapidations—a work which, with that in hand, would complete the section for which he had been engaged. Mr. Wardlaw had left the castle; so also had Charlotte, by her own wish, her residence there having been found too oppressive to herself to be continued for the present. Accompanied by Mrs. Goodman, Milly, and Clémentine, the elderly French maid, who still remained with them, Paula drove into Markton in the twilight and took the train to Budmouth.

When they got there they found that an unpleasant breeze was blowing out at sea, though inland it had been calm enough. Mrs. Goodman proposed to stay at Budmouth till the next day, in hope that there might be smooth water; but an English seaport inn being a thing that Paula disliked more than a rough passage, she would not listen to this counsel. Other impatient reasons, too, might have weighed with her. When night came their looming miseries began. Paula found

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that in addition to her own troubles she had those of three other people to support ; but she did not audibly complain.

‘Paula, Paula,’ said Mrs. Goodman from beneath her load of wretchedness, ‘why did we think of under-going this?’

A slight gleam of humour crossed Paula’s not particularly blooming face, as she answered, ‘Ah, why indeed?’

‘What is the real reason, my dear? For God’s sake tell me!’

‘It begins with S.’

‘Well, I would do anything for that young man short of personal martyrdom ; but really when it comes to that——’

‘Don’t criticize me, auntie, and I won’t criticize you.’

‘Well, I am open to criticism just now, I am sure,’ said her aunt, with a green smile ; and speech was again discontinued.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and it could again be seen in Paula’s looks that she was glad she had come, though, in taking their rest at Cherbourg, fate consigned them to an hotel breathing an atmosphere that seemed specially compounded for depressing the spirits of a young woman ; indeed nothing had particularly encouraged her thus far in her somewhat peculiar scheme of searching out and expressing sorrow to a gentleman for having believed those who traduced him ; and this *coup d’audace* to which she had committed herself began to look somewhat formidable. When in England the plan of following him to Normandy had suggested itself as the quickest, sweetest, and most honest way of making amends ; but having arrived there she seemed further off from his sphere of existence than when she had been at Stancy Castle. Virtually she was, for if he thought of her at all, he probably thought

of her there; if he sought her he would seek her there. However, as he would probably never do the latter, it was necessary to go on. It had been her sudden dream, before starting, to light accidentally upon him in some romantic old town of this romantic old province, but she had become aware that the recorded fortune of lovers in that respect was not to be trusted too implicitly.

Somerset's search for her in the south was now inversely imitated. By diligent inquiry in Cherbourg during the gloom of evening, in the disguise of a hooded cloak, she learnt out the place of his stay while there, and that he had gone thence to Lisieux. What she knew of the architectural character of Lisieux half guaranteed the truth of the information. Without telling her aunt of this discovery she announced to that lady that it was her great wish to go on and see the beauties of Lisieux.

But though her aunt was simple, there were bounds to her simplicity. 'Paula,' she said, with an undeceivable air, 'I don't think you should run after a young man like this. Suppose he shouldn't care for you by this time.'

It was no occasion for further affectation. 'I am *sure* he will,' answered her niece flatly. 'I have not the least fear about it; nor would you, if you knew how he is. He will forgive me anything.'

'Well, pray don't show yourself forward. Some people are apt to fly into extremes.'

Paula blushed a trifle, and reflected, and made no answer. However, her purpose seemed not to be permanently affected, for the next morning she was up betimes and preparing to depart; and they proceeded almost without stopping to the architectural curiosity-town which had so quickly interested her. Nevertheless her ardent manner of yesterday underwent a considerable change, as if she had a fear that, as her aunt

PAULA

suggested, in her endeavour to make amends for cruel injustice, she was allowing herself to be carried too far.

On nearing the place she said, 'Aunt, I think you had better call upon him; and you need not tell him we have come on purpose. Let him think, if he will, that we heard he was here, and would not leave without seeing him. You can also tell him that I am anxious to clear up a misunderstanding, and ask him to call at our hotel.'

But as she looked over the dreary suburban erections which lined the road from the railway to the old quarter of the town, it occurred to her that Somerset would at that time of day be engaged in one or other of the mediæval buildings thereabout, and that it would be a much neater thing to meet him as if by chance in one of these edifices than to call upon him anywhere. Instead of putting up at any hotel, they left the maids and baggage at the station; and hiring a carriage, Paula told the coachman to drive them to such likely places as she could think of.

'He'll never forgive you,' said her aunt, as they rumbled into the town.

'Won't he?' said Paula, with soft faith. 'I'll see about that.'

'What are you going to do when you find him? Tell him point-blank that you are in love with him?'

'Act in such a manner that he may tell me he is in love with me.'

They first visited a large church at the upper end of a square that sloped its gravelled surface to the western shine, and was pricked out with little avenues of young pollard limes. The church within was one to make any Gothic architect take lodgings in its vicinity for a fortnight, though it was just now crowded with a forest of scaffolding for repairs in progress. Mrs. Goodman sat down outside, and Paula, entering, took a walk in the form of a horse-shoe; that is, up the south aisle,

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round the apse, and down the north side; but no figure of a melancholy young man sketching met her eye anywhere. The sun that blazed in at the west doorway smote her face as she emerged from beneath it, and revealed real sadness there.

'This is not all the old architecture of the town by far,' she said to her aunt with an air of confidence. 'Coachman, drive to St. Jacques.'

He was not at St. Jacques'. Looking from the west end of that building the girl observed the end of a steep narrow street of antique character, which seemed a likely haunt. Beckoning to her aunt to follow in the fly Paula walked down the street.

She was transported to the Middle Ages. It contained the shops of tinkers, braziers, bellows-menders, hollow-turners, and other quaintest trades, their fronts open to the street beneath stories of timber overhanging so far on each side that a slit of sky was left at the top for the light to descend, and no more. A blue misty obscurity pervaded the atmosphere, into which the sun thrust oblique staves of light. It was a street for a mediævalist to revel in, toss up his hat and shout hurrah in, send for his luggage, come and live in, die and be buried in. She had never supposed such a street to exist outside the imaginations of antiquarians. Smells direct from the sixteenth century hung in the air in all their original integrity and without a modern taint. The faces of the people in the doorways seemed those of individuals who habitually gazed on the great Francis, and spoke of Henry the Eighth as the king across the sea.

She inquired of a coppersmith if an English artist had been seen here lately. With a suddenness that almost discomfited her he announced that such a man had been seen, sketching a house just below—the 'Vieux Manoir de François premier.' Just turning to see that her aunt was following in the fly, Paula

PAULA

advanced to the house. The wood framework of the lower story was black and varnished; the upper story was brown and not varnished; carved figures of dragons, griffins, satyrs, and mermaids swarmed over the front; an ape stealing apples was the subject of this cantilever, a man undressing of that. These figures were cloaked with little cobwebs which waved in the breeze, so that each figure seemed alive.

She examined the woodwork closely; here and there she discerned pencil-marks which had no doubt been jotted thereon by Somerset as points of admeasurement, in the way she had seen him mark them at the castle. Some fragments of paper lay below: there were pencilled lines on them, and they bore a strong resemblance to a spoilt leaf of Somerset's sketch-book. Paula glanced up, and from a window above protruded an old woman's head, which, with the exception of the white handkerchief tied round it, was so nearly of the colour of the carvings that she might easily have passed as of a piece with them. The aged woman continued motionless, the remains of her eyes being bent upon Paula, who asked her in Englishwoman's French where the sketcher had gone. Without replying, the crone produced a hand and extended finger from her side, and pointed towards the lower end of the street.

Paula went on, the carriage following with difficulty, on account of the obstructions in the thoroughfare. At bottom, the street abutted on a wide one with customary modern life flowing through it; and as she looked, Somerset crossed her front along this street, hurrying as if for a wager.

By the time that Paula had reached the bottom Somerset was a long way to the left, and she recognized to her dismay that the busy transverse street was one which led to the railway. She quickened her pace to a run; he did not see her; he even walked faster.

A LAODICEAN

She looked behind for the carriage. The driver in emerging from the sixteenth-century street to the nineteenth had apparently turned to the right, instead of to the left as she had done, so that her aunt had lost sight of her. However, she dare not mind it, if Somerset would but look back! He partly turned, but not far enough, and it was only to hail a passing omnibus upon which she discerned his luggage. Somerset jumped in, the omnibus drove on, and diminished up the long road. Paula stood hopelessly still, and in a few minutes puffs of steam showed her that the train had gone.

She turned and waited, the two or three children who had gathered round her looking up sympathizingly in her face. Her aunt, having now discovered the direction of her flight, drove up and beckoned to her.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Mrs. Goodman in alarm.

‘Why?’

‘That you should run like that, and look so woe-begone.’

‘Nothing: only I have decided not to stay in this town.’

‘What! he is gone, I suppose?’

‘Yes!’ exclaimed Paula, with tears of vexation in her eyes. ‘It isn’t every man who gets a woman of my position to run after him on foot, and alone, and he ought to have looked round! Drive to the station; I want to make an inquiry.’

On reaching the station she asked the booking-clerk some questions, and returned to her aunt with a cheerful countenance. ‘Mr. Somerset has only gone to Caen,’ she said. ‘He is the only Englishman who went by this train, so there is no mistake. There is no other train for two hours. We will go on then—shall we?’

‘I am indifferent,’ said Mrs. Goodman. ‘But,

PAULA

Paula, do you think this quite right? Perhaps he is not so anxious for your forgiveness as you think. Perhaps he saw you, and wouldn't stay.'

A momentary dismay crossed her face, but it passed, and she answered, 'Aunt, that's nonsense. I know him well enough, and can assure you that if he had only known I was running after him, he would have looked round sharply enough, and would have given his little finger rather than have missed me! I don't make myself so silly as to run after a gentleman without good grounds, for I know well that it is an undignified thing to do. Indeed, I could never have thought of doing it, if I had not been so miserably in the wrong!'

II

THAT evening when the sun was dropping out of sight they started for the city of Somerset's pilgrimage. Paula seated herself with her face toward the western sky, watching from her window the broad red horizon, across which moved thin poplars lopped to human shapes, like the walking forms in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. It was dark when the travellers drove into Caen.

She still persisted in her wish to casually encounter Somerset in some aisle, lady-chapel, or crypt to which he might have betaken himself to copy and learn the secret of the great artists who had erected those nooks. Mrs. Goodman was for discovering his inn, and calling upon him in a straightforward way; but Paula seemed afraid of it, and they went out in the morning on foot. First they searched the church of St. Sauveur; he was not there; next the church of St. Jean; then the church of St. Pierre; but he did not reveal himself, nor had any verger seen or heard of such a man. Outside the latter church was a public flower-garden, and she sat down to consider beside a round pool in which water-lilies grew and gold-fish swam, near beds of fiery geraniums, dahlias, and verbenas just past their bloom. Her enterprise had not been justified by its results so far; but meditation still urged

PAULA

her to listen to the little voice within and push on. She accordingly rejoined her aunt, and they drove up the hill to the Abbaye aux Dames, the day by this time having grown hot and oppressive.

The church seemed absolutely empty, the void being emphasized by its grateful coolness. But on going towards the east end they perceived a bald gentleman close to the screen, looking to the right and to the left as if much perplexed. Paula merely glanced over him, his back being toward her, and turning to her aunt said softly, 'I wonder how we get into the choir?'

'That's just what I am wondering,' said the old gentleman, abruptly facing round, and Paula discovered that the countenance was not unfamiliar to her eye. Since knowing Somerset she had added to her gallery of celebrities a photograph of his father, the Academician, and he it was now who confronted her.

For the moment embarrassment, due to complicated feelings, brought a slight blush to her cheek, but being well aware that he did not know her, she answered, coolly enough, 'I suppose we must ask some one.'

'And we certainly would if there were any one to ask,' he said, still looking eastward, and not much at her. 'I have been here a long time, but nobody comes. Not that I want to get in on my own account; for though it is thirty years since I last set foot in this place, I remember it as if it were but yesterday.'

'Indeed. I have never been here before,' said Paula.

'Naturally. But I am looking for a young man who is making sketches in some of these buildings, and it is as likely as not that he is in the crypt under this choir, for it is just such out-of-the-way nooks that he prefers. It is very provoking that he should not have told me more distinctly in his letter where to find him.'

Mrs. Goodman, who had gone to make inquiries, now came back, and informed them that she had learnt that it was necessary to pass through the Hôtel-Dieu to

the choir, to do which they must go outside. There-upon they walked on together, and Mr. Somerset, quite ignoring his troubles, made remarks upon the beauty of the architecture; and in absence of mind, by reason either of the subject, or of his listener, retained his hat in his hand after emerging from the church, while they walked all the way across the Place and into the Hospital gardens.

‘A very civil man,’ said Mrs. Goodman to Paula privately.

‘Yes,’ said Paula, who had not told her aunt that she recognized him.

One of the Sisters now preceded them towards the choir and crypt, Mr. Somerset asking her if a young Englishman was or had been sketching there. On receiving a reply in the negative, Paula nearly betrayed herself by turning, as if her business there, too, ended with the information. However, she went on again, and made a pretence of looking round, Mr. Somerset also staying in a spirit of friendly attention to his countrywomen. They did not part from him till they had come out from the crypt, and again reached the west front, on their way to which he additionally explained that it was his son he was looking for, who had arranged to meet him here, but had mentioned no inn at which he might be expected.

When he had left them, Paula informed her aunt whose company they had been sharing. Her aunt began expostulating with Paula for not telling Mr. Somerset what they had seen of his son’s movements. ‘It would have eased his mind at least,’ she said.

‘I was not bound to ease his mind at the expense of showing what I would rather conceal. I am continually hampered in such generosity as that by the circumstance of being a woman!’

‘Well, it is getting too late to search further to-night.’

PAULA

It was indeed almost evening twilight in the streets, though the graceful freestone spires to a depth of about twenty feet from their summits were still dyed with the orange tints of a vanishing sun. The two relatives dined privately as usual, after which Paula looked out of the window of her room, and reflected upon the events of the day. A tower rising into the sky quite near at hand showed her that some church or other stood within a few steps of the hotel archway, and saying nothing to Mrs. Goodman, she quietly cloaked herself, and went out towards it, apparently with the view of disposing of a portion of a dull dispiriting evening. The church was open, and on entering she found that it was only lighted by seven candles burning before the altar of a chapel on the south side, the mass of the building being in deep shade. Motionless outlines, which resolved themselves into the forms of kneeling women, were darkly visible among the chairs, and in the triforium above the arcades there was one hitherto unnoticed radiance, dim as that of a glow-worm in the grass. It was seemingly the effect of a solitary tallow-candle behind the masonry.

A priest came in, unlocked the door of a confessional with a click which sounded in the silence, and entered it; a woman followed, disappeared within the curtain of the same, emerging again in about five minutes, followed by the priest, who locked up his door with another loud click, like a tradesman full of business, and came down the aisle to go out. In the lobby he spoke to another woman, who replied, 'Ah, oui, Monsieur l'Abbé!'

Two women having spoken to him, there could be no harm in a third doing likewise. 'Monsieur l'Abbé,' said Paula in French, 'could you indicate to me the stairs of the triforium?' and she signified her reason for wishing to know by pointing to the glimmering light above.

A LAODICEAN

‘Ah, he is a friend of yours, the Englishman?’ pleasantly said the priest, recognizing her nationality; and taking her to a little door he conducted her up a stone staircase, at the top of which he showed her the long blind story over the aisle arches which led round to where the light was. Cautioning her not to stumble over the uneven floor, he left her and descended. His words had signified that Somerset was here.

It was a gloomy place enough that she found herself in, but the seven candles below on the opposite altar, and a faint sky light from the clerestory, lent enough rays to guide her. Paula walked on to the bend of the apse: here were a few chairs, and the origin of the light.

This was a candle stuck at the end of a sharpened stick, the latter entering a joint in the stones. A young man was sketching by the glimmer. But there was no need for the blush which had prepared itself beforehand; the young man was Mr. Cockton, Somerset’s youngest draughtsman.

Paula could have cried aloud with disappointment. Cockton recognized Miss Power, and appearing much surprised, rose from his seat with a bow, and said hastily, ‘Mr. Somerset left to-day.’

‘I did not ask for him,’ said Paula.

‘No, Miss Power: but I thought——’

‘Yes, yes—you know, of course, that he has been my architect. Well, it happens that I should like to see him, if he can call on me. Which way did he go?’

‘He’s gone to Étretât.’

‘What for? There are no abbeys to sketch at Étretât.’

Cockton looked at the point of his pencil, and with a hesitating motion of his lip answered, ‘Mr. Somerset said he was tired.’

‘Of what?’

‘He said he was sick and tired of holy places, and

PAULA

would go to some wicked spot or other, to get that consolation which holiness could not give. But he only said it casually to Knowles, and perhaps he did not mean it.'

'Knowles is here too?'

'Yes, Miss Power, and Bowles. Mr. Somerset has been kind enough to give us a chance of enlarging our knowledge of French Early-pointed, and pays half the expenses.'

Paula said a few other things to the young man, walked slowly round the triforium as if she had come to examine it, and returned down the staircase. On getting back to the hotel she told her aunt, who had just been having a nap, that next day they would go to Étretât for a change.

'Why? There are no old churches at Étretât.'

'No. But I am sick and tired of holy places, and want to go to some wicked spot or other to find that consolation which holiness cannot give.'

'For shame, Paula! Now I know what it is; you have heard that he's gone there! You needn't try to blind me.'

'I don't care where he's gone!' cried Paula petulantly. In a moment, however, she smiled at herself, and added, 'You must take that for what it is worth. I have made up my mind to let him know from my own lips how the misunderstanding arose. That done, I shall leave him, and probably never see him again. My conscience will be clear.'

The next day they took the steamboat down the Orne, intending to reach Étretât by way of Havre. Just as they were moving off an elderly gentleman under a large white sunshade, and carrying his hat in his hand, was seen leisurely walking down the wharf at some distance, but obviously making for the boat.

'A gentleman!' said the mate.

A LAODICEAN

‘Who is he?’ said the captain.

‘An English,’ said Clémentine.

Nobody knew more, but as leisure was the order of the day the engines were stopped, on the chance of his being a passenger, and all eyes were bent upon him in conjecture. He disappeared and reappeared from behind a pile of merchandise and approached the boat at an easy pace, whereupon the gangway was replaced, and he came on board, removing his hat to Paula, quietly thanking the captain for stopping, and saying to Mrs. Goodman, ‘I am nicely in time.’

It was Mr. Somerset the elder, who by degrees informed our travellers, as sitting on their camp-stools they advanced between the green banks bordered by elms, that he was going to Étretât; that the young man he had spoken of yesterday had gone to that romantic watering-place instead of studying art at Caen, and that he was going to join him there.

Paula preserved an entire silence as to her own intentions, partly from natural reticence, and partly, as it appeared, from the difficulty of explaining a complication which was not very clear to herself. At Havre they parted from Mr. Somerset, and did not see him again till they were driving over the hills towards Étretât in a carriage and four, when the white umbrella became visible far ahead among the outside passengers of the coach to the same place. In a short time they had passed and cut in before this vehicle, but soon became aware that their carriage, like the coach, was one of a straggling procession of conveyances, some mile and a half in length, all bound for the village between the cliffs.

In descending the long hill shaded by lime-trees which sheltered their place of destination, this procession closed up, and they perceived that all the visitors and native population had turned out to wel-

PAULA

come them, the daily arrival of new sojourners at this hour being the chief excitement of Étretât. The coach which had preceded them all the way, at more or less remoteness, was now quite close, and in passing along the village street they saw Mr. Somerset wave his hand to somebody in the crowd below. A felt hat was waved in the air in response, the coach swept into the inn-yard, followed by the idlers, and all disappeared. Paula's face was crimson as their own carriage swept round in the opposite direction to the rival inn.

Once in her room she breathed like a person who had finished a long chase. They did not go down before dinner, but when it was almost dark Paula begged her aunt to wrap herself up and come with her to the shore hard by. The beach was deserted, everybody being at the Casino; the gate stood invitingly open, and they went in. Here the brilliantly lit terrace was crowded with promenaders, and outside the yellow palings, surmounted by its row of lamps, rose the voice of the invisible sea. Groups of people were sitting under the verandah, the women mostly in wraps, for the air was growing chilly. Through the windows at their back an animated scene disclosed itself in the shape of a room-full of waltzers, the strains of the band striving in the ear for mastery over the sounds of the sea. The dancers came round a couple at a time, and were individually visible to those people without who chose to look that way, which was what Paula did.

'Come away, come away!' she suddenly said. 'It is not right for us to be here.'

Her exclamation had its origin in what she had at that moment seen within, the spectacle of Mr. George Somerset whirling round the room with a young lady of uncertain nationality but pleasing figure. Paula was not accustomed to show the white feather too clearly,

but she soon had passed out through those yellow gates and retreated, till the mixed music of sea and band had resolved into that of the sea alone.

‘Well!’ said her aunt, half in soliloquy, ‘do you know who I saw dancing there, Paula? Our Mr. Somerset, if I don’t make a great mistake!’

‘It was likely enough that you did,’ sedately replied her niece. ‘He left Caen with the intention of seeking distractions of a lighter kind than those furnished by art, and he has merely succeeded in finding them. But he has made my duty rather a difficult one. Still, it was my duty, for I very greatly wronged him. Perhaps, however, I have done enough for honour’s sake. I would have humiliated myself by an apology if I had found him in any other situation; but, of course, one can’t be expected to take *much* trouble when he is seen going on like that!’

The coolness with which she began her remarks had developed into something like warmth as she concluded.

‘He is only dancing with a lady he probably knows very well.’

‘He doesn’t know her! The idea of his dancing with a woman of that description! We will go away to-morrow. This place has been greatly over-praised.’

‘The place is well enough, as far as I can see.’

‘He is carrying out his programme to the letter. He plunges into excitement in the most reckless manner, and I tremble for the consequences! I can do no more: I have humiliated myself into following him, believing that in giving too ready credence to appearances I had been narrow and inhuman, and had caused him much misery. But he does not mind, and he has no misery; he seems just as well as ever. How much this finding him has cost me! After all, I did not deceive him. He must have acquired a natural aversion for me. I have allowed myself to

PAULA

be interested in a man of very common qualities, and am now bitterly alive to the shame of having sought him out. I heartily detest him! I will go back—
aunt, you are right—I had no business to come. . . .
His light conduct has rendered him uninteresting to me!'

P

III

WHEN she rose the next morning the bell was clanging for the second breakfast, and people were pouring in from the beach in every variety of attire. Paula, whom a restless night had left with a headache, which, however, she said nothing about, was reluctant to emerge from the seclusion of her chamber, till her aunt, discovering what was the matter with her, suggested that a few minutes in the open air would refresh her; and they went downstairs into the hotel gardens.

The clatter of the big breakfast within was audible from this spot, and the noise seemed suddenly to inspirit Paula, who proposed to enter. Her aunt assented. In the verandah under which they passed was a rustic hat-stand in the form of a tree, upon which hats and other body-gear hung like bunches of fruit. Paula's eye fell upon a felt hat to which a small block-book was attached by a string. She knew that hat and block-book well, and turning to Mrs. Goodman said, 'After all, I don't want the breakfast they are having: let us order one of our own as usual. And we'll have it here.'

She led on to where some little tables were placed under the tall shrubs, followed by her aunt, who was in turn followed by the proprietress of the hotel, that lady having discovered from the French maid that

PAULA

there was good reason for paying these ladies ample personal attention.

‘Is the gentleman to whom that sketch-book belongs staying here?’ Paula carelessly inquired, as she indicated the object on the hat-stand.

‘Ah, no!’ deplored the proprietress. ‘The Hotel was full when Mr. Somerset came. He stays at a cottage beyond the Rue Anicet Bourgeois: he only has his meals here.’

Paula had taken her seat under the fuchsia-trees in such a manner that she could observe all the exits from the *salle à manger*; but for the present none of the breakfasters emerged, the only moving objects on the scene being the waitresses who ran hither and thither across the court, the cook’s assistants with baskets of long bread, and the laundresses with baskets of sun-bleached linen. Further back towards the inn-yard, stablemen were putting in the horses for starting the flies and coaches to Les Ifs, the nearest railway-station.

‘Suppose the Somersets should be going off by one of these conveyances,’ said Mrs. Goodman as she sipped her tea.

‘Well, aunt, then they must,’ replied the younger lady with composure.

Nevertheless she looked with some misgiving at the nearest stableman as he led out four white horses, harnessed them, and leisurely brought a brush with which he began blacking their yellow hoofs. All the vehicles were ready at the door by the time breakfast was over, and the inmates soon turned out, some to mount the omnibuses and carriages, some to ramble on the adjacent beach, some to climb the verdant slopes, and some to make for the cliffs that shut in the vale. The fuchsia-trees which sheltered Paula’s breakfast-table from the blaze of the sun, also screened it from the eyes of the outpouring company, and she sat on with her aunt in perfect comfort, till among the last of the

stream came Somerset and his father. Paula reddened at being so near the former at last. It was with sensible relief that she observed them turn towards the cliffs and not to the carriages, and thus signify that they were not going off that day.

Neither of the two saw the ladies, and when the latter had finished their tea and coffee they followed to the shore, where they sat for nearly an hour, reading and watching the bathers. At length footsteps crunched among the pebbles in their vicinity, and looking out from her sunshade Paula saw the two Somersets close at hand.

The elder recognized her, and the younger, observing his father's action of courtesy, turned his head. It was a revelation to Paula, for she was shocked to see that he appeared worn and ill. The expression of his face changed at sight of her, increasing its shade of paleness; but he immediately withdrew his eyes and passed by.

Somerset was as much surprised at encountering her thus as she had been distressed to see him. As soon as they were out of hearing, he asked his father quietly, 'What strange thing is this, that Lady De Stancy should be here and her husband not with her? Did she bow to me, or to you?'

'Lady De Stancy—that young lady?' asked the puzzled painter. He proceeded to explain all he knew; that she was a young lady he had met on his journey at two or three different times; moreover, that if she were his son's client—the woman who was to have become Lady De Stancy—she was Miss Power still; for he had seen in some newspaper two days before leaving England that the wedding had been postponed on account of her illness.

Somerset was so greatly moved that he could hardly speak connectedly to his father as they paced on together. 'But she is not ill, as far as I can see,' he said. 'The wedding postponed?—You are sure the word was postponed?—Was it broken off?'

PAULA

‘No, it was postponed. I meant to have told you before, knowing you would be interested as the castle architect; but it slipped my memory in the bustle of arriving.’

‘I am not the castle architect.’

‘The devil you are not—what are you then?’

‘Well, I am not that.’

Somerset the elder, though not of penetrating nature, began to see that here lay an emotional complication of some sort, and reserved further inquiry till a more convenient occasion. They had reached the end of the level beach where the cliff began to rise, and as this impediment naturally stopped their walk they retraced their steps. On again nearing the spot where Paula and her aunt were sitting, the painter would have deviated to the hotel; but as his son persisted in going straight on, in due course they were opposite the ladies again. By this time Miss Power, who had appeared anxious during their absence, regained her self-control. Going towards her old lover she said, with a smile, ‘I have been looking for you!’

‘Why have you been doing that?’ said Somerset, in a voice which he failed to keep as steady as he could wish.

‘Because—I want some architect to continue the restoration. Do you withdraw your resignation?’

Somerset appeared unable to decide for a few instants. ‘Yes,’ he then answered.

For the moment they had ignored the presence of the painter and Mrs. Goodman, but Somerset now made them known to one another, and there was friendly intercourse all round.

‘When will you be able to resume operations at the castle?’ she asked, as soon as she could again speak directly to Somerset.

‘As soon as I can get back. Of course I only resume it at your special request.’

A LAODICEAN

‘Of course.’ To one who had known all the circumstances it would have seemed a thousand pities that, after again getting face to face with him, she did not explain, without delay, the whole mischief that had separated them. But she did not do it—perhaps from the inherent awkwardness of such a topic at this idle time. She confined herself simply to the above-mentioned business-like request, and when the party had walked a few steps together they separated, with mutual promises to meet again.

‘I hope you have explained your mistake to him, and how it arose, and everything?’ said her aunt when they were alone.

‘No, I did not.’

‘What, not explain after all?’ said her amazed relative.

‘I decided to put it off.’

‘Then I think you decided very wrongly. Poor young man, he looked so ill!’

‘Did you, too, think he looked ill? But he danced last night. Why did he dance?’ She turned and gazed regretfully at the corner round which the Somersets had disappeared.

‘I don’t know why he danced; but if I had known you were going to be so silent, I would have explained the mistake myself.’

‘I wish you had. But no; I have said I would; and I must.’

Paula’s avoidance of *tables d’hôte* did not extend to the present one. It was quite with alacrity that she went down; and with her entry the antecedent hotel beauty who had reigned for the last five days at that meal, was unceremoniously deposed by the guests. Mr. Somerset the elder came in, but nobody with him. His seat was on Paula’s left hand, Mrs. Goodman being on Paula’s right, so that all the conversation was between the Academician and the younger lady. When

PAULA

the latter had again retired upstairs with her aunt, Mrs. Goodman expressed regret that young Mr. Somerset was absent from the table. 'Why has he kept away?' she asked.

'I don't know—I didn't ask,' said Paula sadly. 'Perhaps he doesn't care to meet us again.'

'That's because you didn't explain.'

'Well—why didn't the old man give me an opportunity?' exclaimed the niece with suppressed excitement. 'He would scarcely say anything but yes and no, and gave me no chance at all of introducing the subject. I wanted to explain—I came all the way on purpose—I would have begged George's pardon on my two knees if there had been any way of beginning; but there was not, and I could not do it!'

Though she slept badly that night, Paula promptly appeared in the public room to breakfast, and that not from motives of vanity; for, while not unconscious of her accession to the unstable throne of queen-beauty in the establishment, she seemed too preoccupied to care for the honour just then, and would readily have changed places with her unhappy predecessor, who lingered on in the background like a candle after sunrise.

Mrs. Goodman was determined to trust no longer to Paula for putting an end to what made her so restless and self-reproachful. Seeing old Mr. Somerset enter to a little side-table behind for lack of room at the crowded centre tables, again without his son, she turned her head and asked point-blank where the young man was.

Mr. Somerset's face became a shade graver than before. 'My son is unwell,' he replied; 'so unwell that he has been advised to stay indoors and take perfect rest.'

'I do hope it is nothing serious.'

'I hope so too. The fact is, he has overdone himself a little. He was not well when he came here; and to make himself worse he must needs go dancing at the

A LAODICEAN

Casino with this lady and that—among others with a young American lady who is here with her family, and whom he met in London last year. I advised him against it, but he seemed desperately determined to shake off lethargy by any rash means, and wouldn't listen to me. Luckily he is not in the hotel, but in a quiet cottage a hundred yards up the hill.'

Paula, who had heard all, did not show or say what she felt at the news: but after breakfast, on meeting the landlady in a passage alone, she asked with some anxiety if there were a really skilful medical man in Étretât; and on being told that there was, and his name, she went back to look for Mr. Somerset; but he had gone.

They heard nothing more of young Somerset all that morning, but towards evening, while Paula sat at her window, looking over the heads of fuchsias upon the promenade beyond, she saw the painter walk by. She immediately went to her aunt and begged her to go out and ask Mr. Somerset if his son had improved.

'I will send Milly or Clémentine,' said Mrs. Goodman.

'I wish you would see him yourself.'

'He has gone on. I shall never find him.'

'He has only gone round to the front,' persisted Paula. 'Do walk that way, auntie, and ask him.'

Thus pressed, Mrs. Goodman acquiesced, and brought back intelligence to Miss Power, who had watched them through the window, that his son did not positively improve, but that his American friends were very kind to him.

Having made use of her aunt, Paula seemed particularly anxious to get rid of her again, and when that lady sat down to write letters, Paula went to her own room, hastily dressed herself without assistance, asked privately the way to the cottage, and went off thitherward unobserved.

PAULA

At the upper end of the lane she saw a little house answering to the description, whose front garden, window-sills, palings, and doorstep were literally ablaze with nasturtiums in bloom.

She entered this inhabited nosegay, quietly asked for the invalid, and if he were well enough to see Miss Power. The woman of the house soon returned, and she was conducted up a crooked staircase to Somerset's modest apartments. It appeared that some rooms in this dwelling had been furnished by the landlady of the inn, who hired them of the tenant during the summer season to use as an *annexe* to the hotel.

Admitted to the outer room she beheld her architect looking as unarchitectural as possible; lying on a small couch which was drawn up to the open casement, whence he had a back view of the window flowers, and enjoyed a green transparency through the undersides of the same nasturtium leaves that presented their faces to the passers without.

When the latch had again clicked into the catch of the closed door Paula went up to the invalid, upon whose pale and interesting face a flush had arisen simultaneously with the announcement of her name. He would have sprung up to receive her, but she pressed him down, and throwing all reserve on one side for the first time in their intercourse, she crouched beside the sofa, whispering with roguish solicitude, her face not too far from his own: 'How foolish you are, George, to get ill just now when I have been wanting so much to see you again!—I am so sorry to see you like this—what I said to you when we met on the shore was not what I had come to say!'

Somerset took her by the hand. 'Then what did you come to say, Paula?' he asked.

'I wanted to tell you that the mere wanton wandering of a capricious mind was not the cause of my estrangement from you. There has been a great

deception practised—the exact nature of it I cannot tell you plainly just at present ; it is too painful—but it is all over, and I can assure you of my sorrow at having behaved as I did, and of my sincere friendship now as ever.’

‘There is nothing I shall value so much as that. It will make my work at the castle very pleasant to feel that I can consult you about it without fear of intruding on you against your wishes.’

‘Yes, perhaps it will. But—you do not comprehend me.’

‘You have been an enigma always.’

‘And you have been provoking ; but never so provoking as now. I wouldn’t for the world tell you the whole of my fancies as I came hither this evening : but I should think your natural intuition would suggest what they were.’

‘It does, Paula. But there are motives of delicacy which prevent my acting on what is suggested to me.’

‘Delicacy is a gift, and you should thank God for it ; but in some cases it is not so precious as we would persuade ourselves.’

‘Not when the woman is rich, and the man is poor ?’

‘O, George Somerset—be cold, or angry, or anything, but don’t be like this ! It is never worth a woman’s while to show regret for her injustice ; for all she gets by it is an accusation of want of delicacy.’

‘Indeed I don’t accuse you of that—I warmly, tenderly thank you for your kindness in coming here to see me.’

‘Well, perhaps you do. But I am now in I cannot tell what mood—I will not tell what mood, for it would be confessing more than I ought. This finding you out is a piece of weakness that I shall not repeat ; and I have only one thing more to say. I have served you badly, George, I know that ; but it is never too

PAULA

late too mend; and I have come back to you. However, I shall never run after you again, trust me for that, for it is not the woman's part. Still, before I go, that there may be no mistake as to my meaning, and misery entailed on us for want of a word, I'll add this: that if you want to marry me, as you once did, you must say so; for I am here to be asked.'

It would be superfluous to transcribe Somerset's reply, and the remainder of the scene between the pair. Let it suffice that half-an-hour afterwards, when the sun had almost gone down, Paula walked briskly into the hotel, troubled herself nothing about dinner, but went upstairs to their sitting-room, where her aunt presently found her upon the couch looking up at the ceiling through her fingers. They talked on different subjects for some time till the old lady said 'Mr. Somerset's cottage is the one covered with flowers up the lane, I hear.'

'Yes,' said Paula.

'How do you know?'

'I've been there. . . . We are going to be married, aunt.'

'Indeed!' replied Mrs. Goodman. 'Well, I thought this might be the end of it: you were determined on the point; and I am not much surprised at your news. Your father was very wise after all in entailing everything so strictly upon your offspring; for if he had not I should have been driven wild with the responsibility!'

'And now that the murder is out,' continued Paula, passing over that view of the case, 'I don't mind telling you that somehow or other I have got to like George Somerset as desperately as a woman can care for any man. I thought I should have died when I saw him dancing, and feared I had lost him! He seemed ten times nicer than ever then! So silly we women are, that I wouldn't marry a duke in preference to him.'

A LAODICEAN

There, that's my honest feeling, and you must make what you can of it; my conscience is clear, thank Heaven !'

'Have you fixed the day?'

'No,' continued the young lady, still watching the sleeping flies on the ceiling. 'It is left unsettled between us, while I come and ask you if there would be any harm—if it could conveniently be before we return to England?'

'Paula, this is too precipitate!'

'On the contrary, aunt. In matrimony, as in some other things, you should be slow to decide, but quick to execute. Nothing on earth would make me marry another man; I know every fibre of his character; and he knows a good many fibres of mine; so as there is nothing more to be learnt, why shouldn't we marry at once? On one point I am firm: I will never return to that castle as Miss Power. A nameless dread comes over me when I think of it—a fear that some uncanny influence of the dead De Stancys would drive me again from him. O, if it were to do that,' she murmured, burying her face in her hands, 'I really think it would be more than I could bear!'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Goodman; 'we will see what can be done. I will write to Mr. Wardlaw.'

IV

ON a windy afternoon in November, when more than two months had closed over the incidents previously recorded, a number of farmers were sitting in a room of the Lord-Quantock-Arms Inn, Markton, that was used for the weekly ordinary. It was a long, low apartment, formed by the union of two or three smaller rooms, with a bow-window looking upon the street, and at the present moment was pervaded by a blue fog from tobacco-pipes, and a temperature like that of a kiln. The body of farmers who still sat on there was greater than usual, owing to the cold air without, the tables having been cleared of dinner for some time and their surface stamped with liquid circles by the feet of the numerous glasses.

Besides the farmers there were present several professional men of the town, who found it desirable to dine here on market-days for the opportunity it afforded them of increasing their practice among the agriculturists, many of whom were men of large balances, even luxurious livers, who drove to market in elegant phaetons drawn by horses of supreme blood, bone, and action, in a style never anticipated by their fathers when jogging thither in light carts, or afoot with a butter basket on each arm.

The buzz of groggy conversation was suddenly im-

pinged on by the notes of a peal of bells from the tower hard by. Almost at the same instant the door of the room opened, and there entered the landlord of the little inn at Sleeping-Green. Drawing his supply of cordials from this superior house, to which he was subject, he came here at stated times like a prebendary to the cathedral of his diocesan, afterwards retailing to his own humbler audience the sentiments which he had learnt of this. But curiosity being awakened by the church bells the usual position was for the moment reversed, and one of the farmers, saluting him by name, asked him the reason of their striking up at that time of day.

‘My mis’ess out yonder,’ replied the rural landlord, nodding sideways, ‘is coming home with her fancy-man. They have been a-gaying together this turk of a while in foreign parts.—Here, maid!—what with the wind, and standing about, my blood’s as low as water—bring us a thimbleful of that that isn’t gin and not far from it.’

‘It is true, then, that she’s become Mrs. Somerset?’ indifferently asked a farmer in broadcloth, tenant of an estate in quite another direction than hers, as he contemplated the grain of the table immediately surrounding the foot of his glass.

‘True—of course it is,’ said Havill, who was also present, in the tone of one who, though sitting in this rubicund company, was not of it. ‘I could have told you the truth of it any day these last five weeks.’

Among those who had lent an ear was Dairyman Jinks, an old gnarled character who wore a white fustian coat and yellow leggings; the only man in the room who never dressed up in dark clothes for marketing. He now asked, ‘Married abroad, was they? And how long will a wedding abroad stand good for in this country?’

‘As long as a wedding at home.’

PAULA

‘Will it? Faith; I didn’t know: how should I? I thought it might be some new plan o’ folks for leasing women now they be so plentiful, so as to get rid o’ ’em when the men be tired o’ ’em, and hev spent all their money.’

‘He won’t be able to spend her money,’ said the landlord of Sleeping-Green. ‘’Tis her very own person’s—settled upon the hairs of her head for ever.’

‘O nation! Then if I were the man I shouldn’t care for such a one-eyed benefit as that,’ said Dairyman Jinks, turning away to listen to the talk on his other hand.

‘Is that true?’ asked the gentleman-farmer in broadcloth.

‘It is sufficiently near the truth,’ said Havill. ‘There is nothing at all unusual in the arrangement; it was only settled so to prevent any schemer making a beggar of her. If Somerset and she have any children, which probably they will, it will be theirs; and what can a man want more? Besides, there is a large portion of property left to her personal use—quite as much as they can want. Oddly enough, the curiosities and pictures of the castle which belonged to the De Stancys are not restricted from sale; they are hers to do what she likes with. Old Power didn’t care for articles that reminded him so much of his predecessors.’

‘Hey?’ said Dairyman Jinks, turning back again, having decided that the conversation on his right hand was, after all, the more interesting. ‘Well—why can’t ’em hire a travelling chap to touch up the picters into her own gaffers and gammers? Then they’d be worth sommat to her.’

‘Ah, here they are? I thought so,’ said Havill, who had been standing up at the window for the last few moments. ‘The ringers were told to begin as soon as the train signalled.’

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As he spoke a carriage drew up to the hotel-door, followed by another with the maid and luggage. The inmates crowded to the bow-window, except Dairyman Jinks, who had become absorbed in his own reflections.

‘What be they stopping here for?’ asked one of the previous speakers.

‘They are going to stay here to-night,’ said Havill. ‘They have come quite unexpectedly, and the castle is in such a state of turmoil that there is not a single carpet down, or room for them to use. We shall get two or three in order by next week.’

‘Two little people like them will be lost in the chammers of that wandering place!’ satirized Dairyman Jinks. ‘They will be bound to have a randy every fortnight to keep the moth out of the furniture!’

By this time Somerset was handing out the wife of his bosom, and Dairyman Jinks went on: ‘That’s no more Miss Power that was, than my niece’s daughter Kezia is Miss Power—in short it is a different woman altogether!’

‘There is no mistake about the woman,’ said the landlord; ‘it is her fur clothes that make her look so like a caterpillar on end. Well, she is not a bad bargain! As for Captain De Stancy, he’ll fret his gizzard green.’

‘He’s the man she ought to ha’ married,’ declared the farmer in broadcloth. ‘As the world goes she ought to have been Lady De Stancy. She gave up her chapel-going, and you might have thought she would have given up her first young man: but she stuck to him, though by all accounts he would soon have been interested in another party.’

‘’Tis woman’s nature to be false except to a man, and man’s nature to be true except to a woman,’ said the landlord of Sleeping-Green. ‘However, all’s well that ends well, and I have something else to

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think of than new-married couples ;' saying which the speaker moved off, and the others returned to their seats, the young pair who had been their theme vanishing through the hotel into some private paradise to rest and dine.

By this time their arrival had become known, and a crowd soon gathered outside, acquiring audacity with continuance there. Raising a hurrah, the group would not leave till Somerset had showed himself on the balcony above ; and then declined to go away till Paula also had appeared ; when, remarking that her husband seemed a quiet young man enough, and would make a very good borough member when their present one misbehaved himself, the assemblage good-humouredly dispersed.

Among those whose ears had been reached by the hurrahs of these idlers was a man in silence and solitude, far out of the town. He was leaning over a gate that divided two meads in a watery level between Stancy Castle and Markton. He turned his head for a few seconds, then continued his contemplative gaze towards the towers of the castle, visible over the trees as far as was possible in the leaden gloom of the November eve. The military form of the solitary loungee was recognizable as that of Sir William De Stancy, notwithstanding the failing light and his attitude of so resting his elbows on the gate that his hands enclosed the greater part of his face.

The scene was inexpressibly cheerless. No other human creature was apparent, and the only sounds audible above the wind were those of the trickling streams which distributed the water over the meadow. A heron had been standing in one of these rivulets about twenty yards from the officer, and they vied with each other in stillness till the bird suddenly rose and flew off to the plantation in which it was

his custom to pass the night with others of his tribe. De Stancy saw the heron rise, and seemed to imagine the creature's departure without a supper to be owing to the increasing darkness; but in another minute he became conscious that the heron had been disturbed by sounds too distant to reach his own ears at the time. They were nearer now, and there came along under the hedge a young man known to De Stancy exceedingly well.

'Ah,' he said listlessly, 'you have ventured back.'

'Yes, captain. Why do you walk out here?'

'The bells began ringing because she and he were expected, and my thoughts naturally dragged me this way. Thank Heaven the battery leaves Markton in a few days, and then the precious place will know me no more!'

'I have heard of it.' Turning to where the dim lines of the castle rose he continued: 'Well, there it stands.'

'And I am not in it.'

'They are not in it yet either.'

'They soon will be.'

'Well — what tune is that you were humming, captain?'

'*All is lost now*,' replied the captain grimly.

'O no; you have got me, and I am a treasure to any man. I have another match in my eye for you, and shall get you well settled yet, if you keep yourself respectable. So thank God, and take courage!'

'Ah, Will—you are a flippant young fool—wise in your own conceit; I say it to my sorrow! 'Twas your dishonesty spoilt all. That lady would have been my wife by fair dealing—time was all I required. But base attacks on a man's character never deserve to win, and if I had once been certain that you had made them, my course would have been very different

PAULA

both towards you and others. But why should I talk to you about this? If I cared an atom what becomes of you I would take you in hand severely enough; not caring, I leave you alone, to go to the devil your own way.'

'Thank you kindly, captain. Well, since you have spoken plainly, I will do the same. We De Stancys are a worn-out old party—that's the long and the short of it. We represent conditions of life that have had their day—especially me. Our one remaining chance was an alliance with new aristocrats; and we have failed. We are past and done for. Our line has had five hundred years of glory, and we ought to be content. *Enfin les renards se trouvent chez le pelletier.*'

'Speak for yourself, young Consequence, and leave the destinies of old families to respectable philosophers. This fiasco is the direct result of evil conduct, and of nothing else at all. I have managed badly; I countenanced you too far. When I saw your impish tendencies I should have forsworn the alliance.'

'Don't sting me, captain. What I have told you is true. As for my conduct, cat will after kind, you know. You should have held your tongue on the wedding morning, and have let me take my chance.'

'Is that all I get for saving you from jail? Gad—I alone am the sufferer, and feel I am alone the fool! . . . Come, off with you—I never want to see you any more.'

'Part we will, then—till we meet again. It will be a light night hereabouts, I think, this evening.'

'A very dark one for me.'

'Nevertheless, I think it will be a light night. *Au revoir!*'

Dare went his way, and after a while De Stancy went his. Both were soon lost in the shades.

V

THE castle to-night was as gloomy as the meads. As Havill had explained, the habitable rooms were just now undergoing a scour, and the main block of buildings was empty even of the few servants who had been retained, they having for comfort's sake taken up their quarters in the detached rooms adjoining the entrance archway. Hence not a single light shone from the lonely windows, at which ivy leaves tapped like woodpeckers, moved by gusts that were numerous and contrary rather than violent. Within the walls all was silence, chaos, and obscurity, till towards eleven o'clock, when the thick immovable cloud that had dulled the daytime broke into a scudding fleece, through which the moon forded her way as a nebulous spot of watery white, sending light enough, though of a rayless kind, into the castle chambers to show the confusion that reigned there.

At this time an eye might have noticed a figure flitting in and about those draughty apartments, and making no more noise in so doing than a puff of wind. Its motion hither and thither was rapid, but methodical; its bearing absorbed, yet cautious. Though it ran more or less through all the principal rooms, the chief scene of its operations was the Long Gallery overlooking the Pleasance, which was covered by an orna-

PAULA

mental wood-and-plaster roof, and contained a whole throng of family portraits, besides heavy old cabinets and the like. The portraits which were of value as works of art were smaller than these, and hung in adjoining rooms.

The manifest occupation of the figure was that of removing these small and valuable pictures from other chambers to the gallery in which the rest were hung, and piling them in a heap in the midst. Included in the group were nine by Sir Peter Lely, five by Vandyck, four by Cornelius Jansen, one by Salvator Rosa (remarkable as being among the few English portraits ever painted by that master), many by Kneller, and two by Romney. Apparently by accident, the light being insufficient to distinguish them from portraits, the figure also brought a Raffaele Virgin-and-Child, a magnificent Tintoretto, a Titian, and a Giorgione.

On these was laid a large collection of enamelled miniature portraits of the same illustrious line; afterwards tapestries and cushions embroidered with the initials 'De S.'; and next the cradle presented by Charles the First to the contemporary De Stancy mother, till at length there arose in the middle of the floor a huge heap containing most of what had been personal and peculiar to members of the De Stancy family as distinct from general furniture.

Then the figure went from door to door, and threw open each that was unfastened. It next proceeded to a room on the ground floor, at present fitted up as a carpenter's shop, and knee-deep in shavings. An armful of these was added to the pile of objects in the gallery; a window at each end of the gallery was opened, causing a brisk draught along the walls; and then the activity of the figure ceased, and it was seen no more.

Five minutes afterwards a light shone upon the lawn from the windows of the Long Gallery, which glowed

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with more brilliancy than it had known in the meridian of its Caroline splendours. Thereupon the framed gentleman in the lace collar seemed to open his eyes more widely; he with the flowing locks and turn-up mustachios to part his lips; he in the armour, who was so much like Captain De Stancy, to shake the plates of his mail with suppressed laughter; the lady with the three-stringed pearl necklace, and vast expanse of neck, to nod with satisfaction and triumphantly signify to her adjoining husband that this was a meet and glorious end.

The flame increased, and blown upon by the wind roared round the pictures, the tapestries, and the cradle, up to the plaster ceiling and through it into the forest of oak timbers above.

The best sitting-room at the Lord-Quantock-Arms in Markton was as cosy this evening as a room can be that lacks the minuter furniture on which cosiness so largely depends. By the fire sat Paula and Somerset, the former with a shawl round her shoulders to keep off the draught which, despite the curtains, forced its way in on this gusty night through the windows opening upon the balcony. Paula held a letter in her hand, the contents of which formed the subject of their conversation. Happy as she was in her general situation, there was for the nonce a tear in her eye.

‘MY EVER DEAR PAULA (ran the letter),—Your last letter has just reached me, and I have followed your account of your travels and intentions with more interest than I can tell. You, who know me, need no assurance of this. At the present moment, however, I am in the whirl of a change that has resulted from a resolution taken some time ago, but concealed from almost everybody till now. Why? Well, I will own—from cowardice—fear lest I should be reasoned out of my plan. I am going to steal from the world, Paula, from the social world, for whose gaieties and ambitions I never had much liking, and whose circles I have not the

PAULA

ability to grace. My home, and resting-place till the great rest comes, is with the Protestant Sisterhood at ——. Whatever shortcomings may be found in such a community, I believe that I shall be happier there than in any other place.

‘Whatever you may think of my judgment in taking this step, I can assure you that I have not done it without consideration. My reasons are good, and my determination is unalterable. But, my own very best friend, and more than sister, don’t think that I mean to leave my love and friendship for you behind me. No, Paula, you will *always* be with me, and I believe that if an increase in what I already feel for you be possible, it will be furthered by the retirement and meditation I shall enjoy in my secluded home. My heart is very full, dear—too full to write more. God bless you, and your husband. You must come and see me there; I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose you who have been so kind. I write this with the fellow-pen to yours, that you gave me when we went to Budmouth together. Good-bye!—Ever your own sister,

CHARLOTTE.’

Paula had first read this through silently, and now in reading it a second time aloud to Somerset her voice faltered, and she wept outright. ‘I had been expecting her to live with us always,’ she said through her tears, ‘and to think she should have decided to do this!’

‘It is a pity certainly,’ said Somerset gently. ‘She was genuine, if anybody ever was; and simple as she was true.’

‘I am the more sorry,’ Paula presently resumed, ‘because of a little plan I had been thinking of with regard to her. You know that the pictures and curiosities of the castle are not included in the things I cannot touch, or impeach, or whatever it is. They are our own to do what we like with. My father felt in devising the estate that, however interesting to the De Stancys those objects might be, they did not concern us—were indeed rather in the way, having been come by so strangely, through Mr. Wilkins, though too valuable to be treated lightly. Now I was going to suggest that we would not

sell them—indeed I could not bear to do such a thing with what had belonged to Charlotte's forefathers—but to hand them over to her as a gift, either to keep for herself, or to pass on to her brother, as she should choose. Now I fear there is no hope of it: and yet I shall never like to see them in the house.'

'It can be done still, I should think. She can accept them for her brother when he settles, without absolutely taking them into her own possession.'

'It would be a kind of generosity which hardly amounts to more than justice (although they were purchased) from a recusant usurper to a dear friend—not that I am a usurper exactly; well, from a representative of the new aristocracy of internationality to a representative of the old aristocracy of exclusiveness.'

'What do you call yourself, Paula, since you are not of your father's creed?'

'I suppose I am what poor Mr. Woodwell said—by the way, we must call and see him—something or other that's in Revelation, neither cold nor hot. But of course that's a sub-species—I may be a lukewarm anything. What I really am, as far as I know, is one of that body to whom lukewarmth is not an accident but a provisional necessity, till they see a little more clearly.' She had crossed over to his side, and pulling his head towards her whispered a name in his ear.

'Why, Mr. Woodwell said you were that too! You carry your beliefs very comfortably. I shall be glad when enthusiasm is come again.'

'I am going to revise and correct my beliefs one of these days when I have thought a little further.' She suddenly breathed a sigh and added, 'How transitory our best emotions are! In talking of myself I am heartlessly forgetting Charlotte, and becoming happy again. I won't be happy to-night for her sake!'

PAULA

A few minutes after this their attention was attracted by a noise of footsteps running along the street; then a heavy tramp of horses, and lumbering of wheels. Other feet were heard scampering at intervals, and soon somebody ascended the staircase and approached their door. The head waiter appeared.

‘Ma’am, Stancy Castle is all afire!’ said the waiter breathlessly.

Somerset jumped up, drew aside the curtains, and stepped into the bow-window. Right before him rose a blaze. The window looked upon the street and along the turnpike road to the very hill on which the castle stood, the keep being visible in the daytime above the trees. Here rose the light, which appeared little further off than a stone’s throw instead of nearly three miles. Every curl of the smoke and every wave of the flame was distinct, and Somerset fancied he could hear the crackling.

Paula had risen from her seat and joined him in the window, where she heard some people in the street saying that the servants were all safe; after which she gave her mind more fully to the material aspects of the catastrophe.

The whole town was now rushing off to the scene of the conflagration, which, shining straight along the street, showed the burgesses’ running figures distinctly upon the illumined road. Paula was quite ready to act upon Somerset’s suggestion that they too should hasten to the spot, and a fly was got ready in a few minutes. With lapse of time Paula evinced more anxiety as to the fate of her castle, and when they had driven as near as it was prudent to do, they dismounted, and went on foot into the throng of people which was rapidly gathering from the town and surrounding villages. Among the faces they recognized Mr. Woodwell, Havill the architect, the rector of the parish, the curate, and many others known to them by sight. These, as soon as they saw

the young couple, came forward with words of condolence, imagining them to have been burnt out of bed, and vied with each other in offering them a lodging. Somerset explained where they were staying and that they required no accommodation, Paula interrupting with 'O my poor horses, what has become of them?'

'The fire is not near the stables,' said Mr. Woodwell. 'It broke out in the body of the building. The horses, however, are driven into the field.'

'I can assure you, you need not be alarmed, madam,' said Havill. 'The chief constable is here, and the two town engines, and I am doing all I can. The castle engine unfortunately is out of repair.'

Somerset and Paula then went on to another point of view near the gymnasium, where they could not be seen by the crowd. Three-quarters of a mile off, on their left hand, the powerful irradiation fell upon the brick chapel in which Somerset had first seen the woman who now stood beside him as his wife. It was the only object visible in that direction, the dull hills and trees behind failing to catch the light. She significantly pointed it out to Somerset, who knew her meaning, and they turned again to the more serious matter.

It had long been apparent that in the face of such a wind all the pigmy appliances that the populace could bring to act upon such a mass of combustion would be unavailing. As much as could burn that night was burnt, while some of that which would not burn crumbled and fell as a formless heap, whence new flames towered up, and inclined to the north-east so far as to singe the trees of the park. The thicker walls of Norman date remained unmoved, partly because of their thickness, and partly because in them stone vaults took the place of wood floors.

The tower clock kept manfully going till it had struck

PAULA

one, its face smiling out from the smoke as if nothing were the matter, after which hour something fell down inside, and it went no more.

Cunningham Haze, with his body of men, was devoted in his attention, and came up to say a word to our two spectators from time to time. Towards four o'clock the flames diminished, and feeling thoroughly weary, Somerset and Paula remained no longer, returning to Markton as they had come.

On their journey they pondered and discussed what course it would be best to pursue in the circumstances, gradually deciding not to attempt rebuilding the castle unless they were absolutely compelled. True, the main walls were still standing as firmly as ever; but there was a feeling common to both of them that it would be well to make an opportunity of a misfortune, and leaving the edifice in ruins start their married life in a mansion of independent construction hard by the old one, unencumbered with the ghosts of an unfortunate line.

'We will build a new house from the ground, eclectic in style. We will remove the ashes, charred wood, and so on from the ruin, and plant more ivy. The winter rains will soon wash the unsightly smoke from the walls, and Stancy Castle will be beautiful in its decay. You, Paula, will be yourself again, and recover, if you have not already, from the warp given to your mind (according to Woodwell) by the mediævalism of that place.'

'And be a perfect representative of "the modern spirit"?' she inquired; 'representing neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination; but what a finished writer calls "the imaginative reason"?''

'Yes; for since it is rather in your line you may as well keep straight on.'

'Very well, I'll keep straight on; and we'll build a

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new house beside the ruin, and show the modern spirit for evermore. . . . But, George, I wish——' And Paula repressed a sigh.

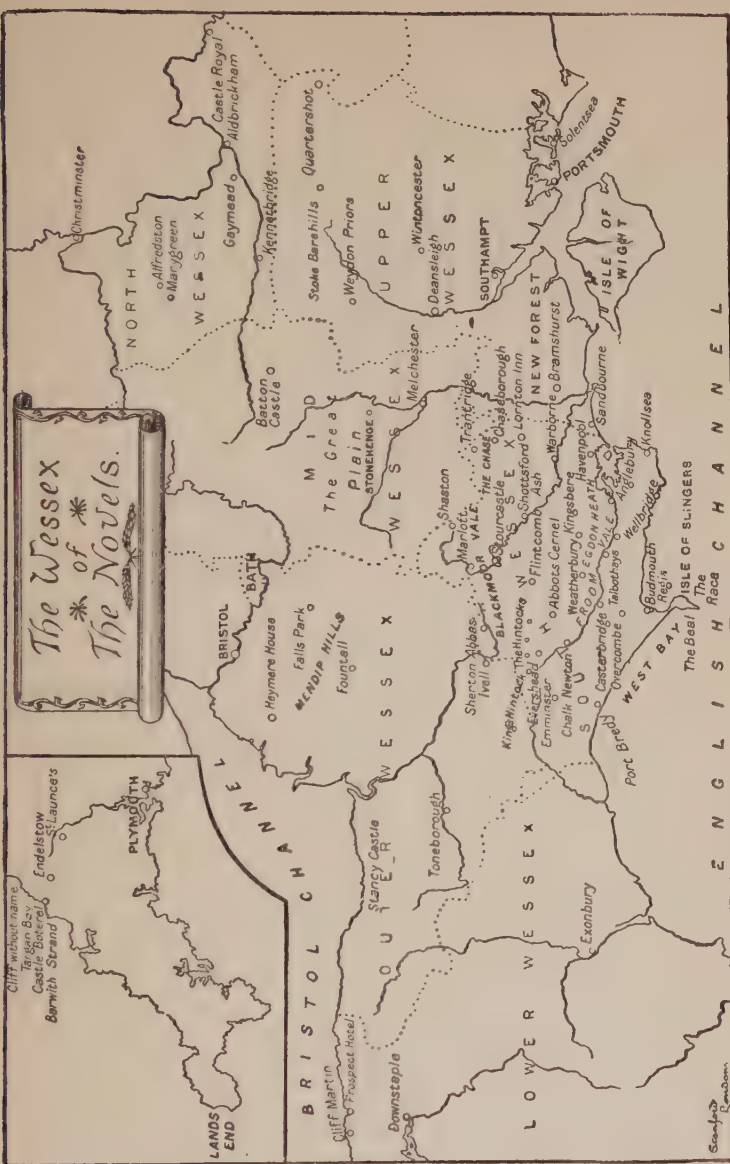
'Well?'

'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!'

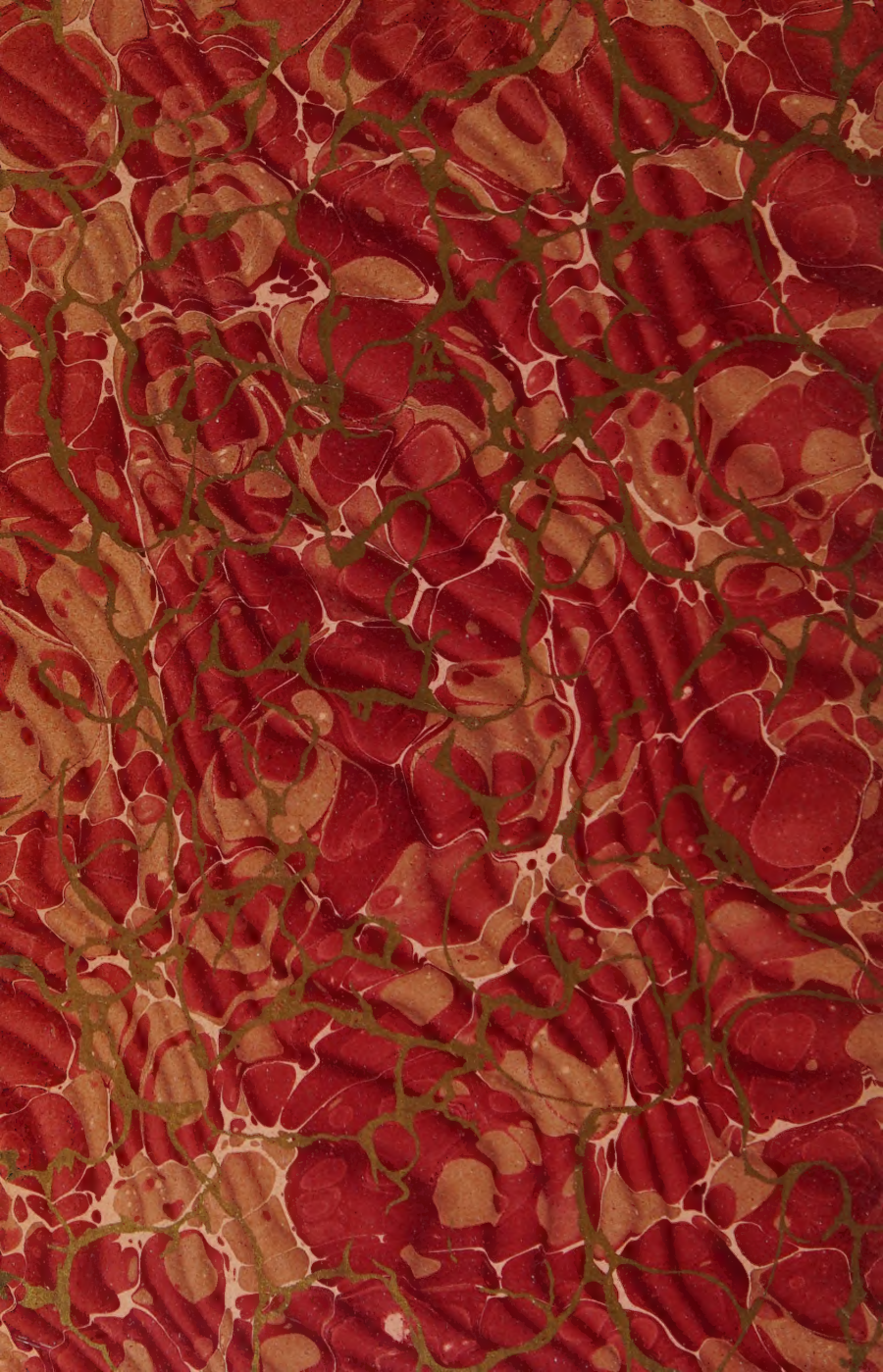
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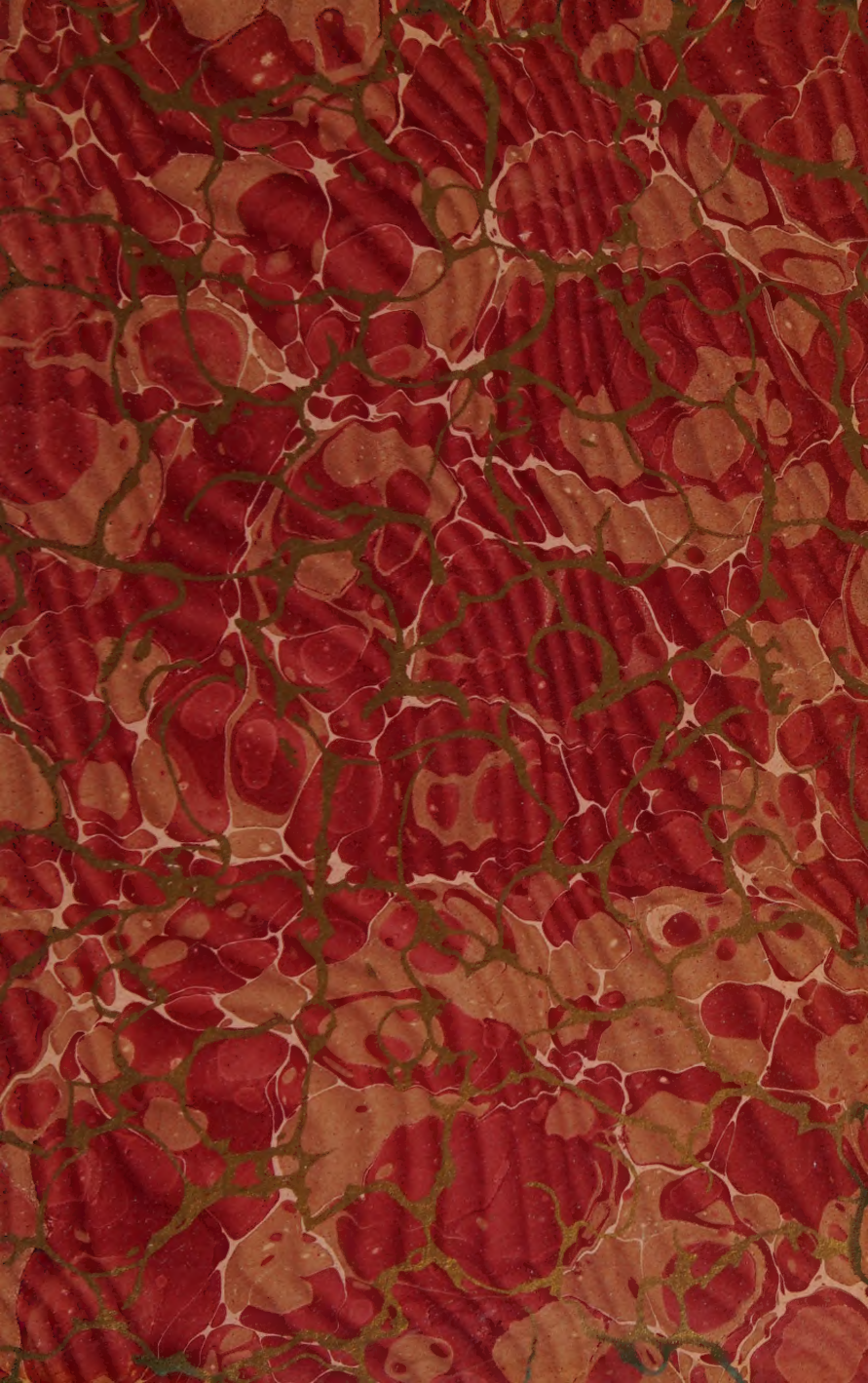
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